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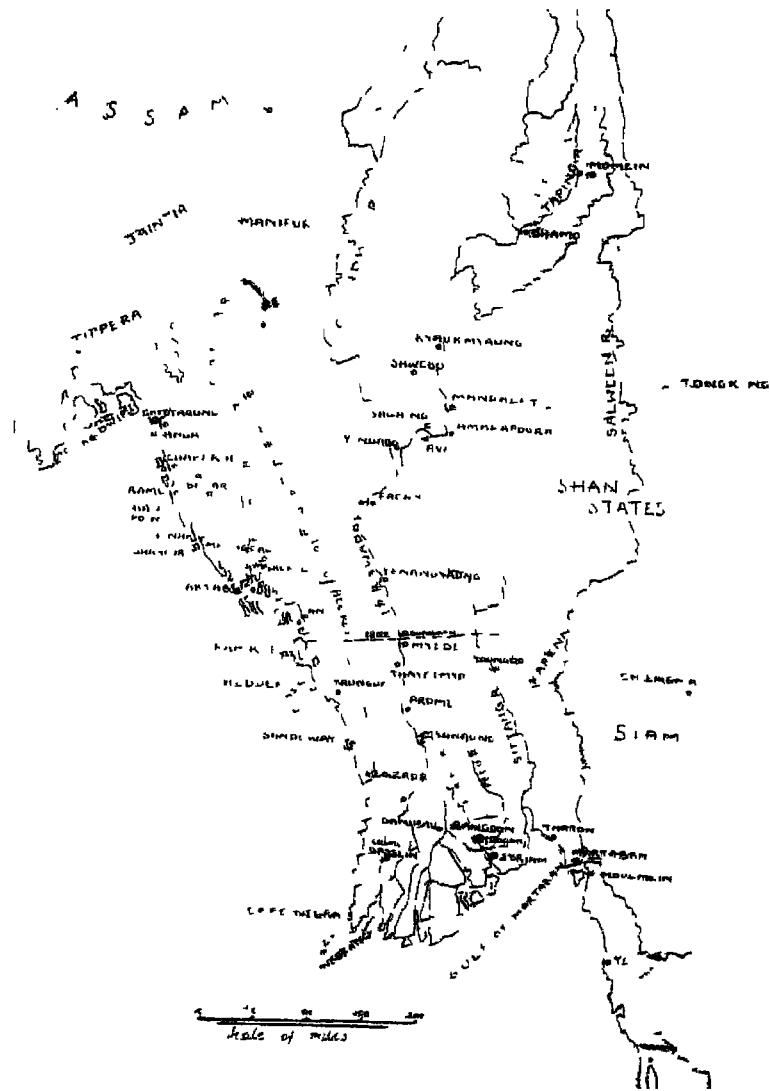
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**EUROPE AND BURMA**

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# EUROPE AND BURMA

A STUDY OF EUROPEAN RELATIONS WITH BURMA  
TO THE ANNEXATION OF THIBAW'S KINGDOM  
1886

by

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## PREFACE

At the present time, when events in Burma occupy so prominent a place in our war news, no apology is needed for an attempt to survey the history of European relations with the country up to the time when with the deposition of King Thibaw in 1885 the old independent kingdom came to an end. Now, as a result of the Japanese incursion, Burma has been placed on the map as never before, and strangely different ideas of her strategic importance from those previously held have come into being. Hence this would seem to be the appropriate moment for telling the story which unfolds itself in these pages. And it is true to say that whereas various parts of it have already appeared in monographs, memoirs and articles in learned journals, notably the publications of the University of Rangoon and the Burma Research Society, the story as a whole has never previously been put together. The book is ~~not~~ more than an outline designed to map out a hitherto uncharted region. It concentrates upon the more important features and the general lay-out, and seeks at each stage to show their connexion with general developments of world history. And although one of my aims has been to provide a background against which present-day affairs may be seen in better perspective, my chief inspiration has been the desire to bridge, however inadequately, what has so far been a lamentable gap in historical knowledge.

Most of the volume is the result of very recent research work. Chapters III-XI, XIV and XV are mainly based upon my own work into original records. But I owe much also to the researches of those who were once my colleagues in the University of Rangoon, notably Professor G. H. Luce, J. S. Furnivall, I.C.S. (retd.), Professor B. R. Pearn, from whose article on "King-bering" in the Journal of the Burma Research Society I derived much help in writing Chapter XI, and Professor W. S. Desai, whose *History of the British Residency in Burma* forms the basis of Chapter XIII. Every student of Burmese History to-day must gratefully acknowledge his debt to G. E. Harvey's *History of Burma*, with its brilliant suggestions, challenging guesses and solid spadework.

Finally, I must express my cordial thanks to my son, Jocelyn, for making the sketch, of which the map is a reproduction, and to my wife for help at every stage in the preparation of this book.

*Caterham School*

*May, 1945.*

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## *Chapter I*

### BURMESE HISTORY

NEXT TO NOTHING THAT IS DEFINITE AND HISTORICAL IS KNOWN ABOUT Burma before the accession of Anawrahta as King of Pagan in 1044 A.D. Burmese traditions hark back to much earlier dates. Unfortunately, mildew, white ants or fire have destroyed almost all their ancient MSS., and as each succeeding dynasty directed revisions of the country's history, practically the only records upon which it is safe to rely for anything further back than two centuries ago are the inscriptions. These are very rare before the 11th century A.D. From this date onwards they are numerous, though their value as sources of political history is disappointing. The great majority of them are concerned purely with endowments to pagodas and monasteries. Since the beginning of the present century trained archaeologists have been systematically working at them. The great pioneer in this work has been M. Charles Duroiselle, late Superintendent of Archaeological Survey, Burma. Then soon after the foundation of Rangoon University in 1920, Professor G. H. Luce took up the task, and by the time of the Japanese invasion had made a monumental collection of rubbings, in preparation for publication by the University. Other sources, which have proved of value in correcting and supplementing the Burmese Court Chronicles, are the classical Chinese histories and Encyclopaedias, worked at some fifty years ago by E. H. Parker, then H.M. Consul at Kiungchow, and more recently by Professor Luce, Mon inscriptions and chronicles, deciphered and translated by Dr. C. O. Blagden and Dr. R. Halliday, Pali texts, collected and edited by Principal Pe Maung Tin of University College, Rangoon, and Burmese local government records of the 17th century onwards by J. S. Furnivall, I.C.S. Since 1910 the Burma Research Society, which published a quarterly journal up to the fall of Burma to the Japanese, and worked in close conjunction with the University of Rangoon, has not only stimulated much discovery, but has also co-ordinated the efforts of a large number of researchers both Asiatic and European.

The last of the great court chronicles, the *Hmannan Yazawin* (Glass Palace Chronicle), compiled in 1829 by a royal commission, is naturally the chief Burmese source used by historians, and is a valuable storehouse of legend, folklore and sober chronicle. The earlier parts of it have been well translated into English by Pe Maung Tin and Luce, and published by the Burma Research Society.

The first Englishman to publish a full-dress history of Burma was the great administrator, Arthur Purves Phayre, whose work, compiled mainly from Burmese sources, appeared in 1883. Though unreliable for the period up to the end of the Middle Ages, it is still of immense value. The only other work on a similar scale is G. F. Harvey's *History of Burma*, which was published in 1925 and incorporated much new information not available in Phayre's day. So much valuable research, however, has been done since that date that large portions of this book also are now out of date, and a really authoritative work has yet to be written.]

The people of Burma comprise various groups, some large in number, others quite small, of the Mongolian family. The Mons spread into the south-eastern parts of the country from a racial centre in what is now Siam. There they united with South Indian colonists and developed the earliest civilization in the country. Later on the Burmese themselves began to infiltrate down the river valleys from eastern Tibet. One early branch of these, the Pyu, settled in central Burma, but ultimately lost its language and separate identity. Another branch, the Arakanese, pushed eastwards from the Irrawaddy and went to colonize the coastal belt beyond the Yomas and to form a kingdom, which remained independent until nearly the end of the 18th century. It is difficult to say when this process began or in what exact order the various tribes came into the country. Professor Luce, from an exhaustive study of the earliest inscriptions, thinks that the process was only completed in the 9th century A.D. Pressing on after the Burmese were the Shans, who colonized the eastern mountain tracts, and, after the fall of the first great Burmese kingdom, ruled by the glorious temple-building dynasty of Pagan from the 11th to the 13th centuries, dominated most of Burma until the end of the 15th century. Compared with the Mons, the Burmese were uncivilized barbarians when they entered the country. They got their civilization largely from the Mons, whom Anawrahta of Pagan conquered in the middle

of the 11th century. The Mons had received most of their culture, including the Buddhist religion, from India; hence the explanation of the extraordinary fact of a Mongolian people with a civilization containing more Indian than Chinese elements.

The great Buddhist state founded at Pagan by Anawrahta in 1044 almost succeeded in uniting Burma, before it was brought to an end by the raiding armies sent against it by Kublai Khan in the late 13th century. Then for two centuries and a half the country was split up into countless tiny states ruled by Shan princes. Out of the chaos of this period three states gradually assumed leading roles in the politics of the country: Ava at the junction of the Irrawaddy with its tributary the Myitnge, Toungoo on the upper waters of the Sittang, and Pegu, originally a port on the estuary of the Sittang, but later silted up and rendered useless to sea-borne traffic. Toungoo became the centre of Burmese national resistance to Shan infiltration, and before the end of the 15th century its ruler was the recognized overlord of most of Lower Burma. He claimed descent from the old Pagan dynasty, and in the next century two monarchs of the Toungoo dynasty, Tabin Shwe Hti (1531-1550) and Bayin-naung (1551-1581), reunited Burma, including Ava in the north, under a Burmese dynasty, and brought to an end the period of Shan domination.

Tabin Shwe Hti made Pegu his capital. Lower Burma by this time was far richer than the more northerly parts of the country. It had a much heavier share of monsoon rains and the ports of Cosmin (modern Bassein), Syriam, Pegu and Martaban brought prosperous maritime trade. Shortly before his accession to the throne Vasco da Gama had discovered the Cape Route to India, and the great Affonso de Albuquerque had laid the foundations of Portuguese domination over the Indian Ocean by the conquest of the important strategic points of Goa, Malacca, Aden and Ormuz. As the Portuguese were chiefly concerned with the spice trade, little official attention was paid to Burma, which lay outside the main trade routes. Albuquerque, however, did send a mission to the kingdom of Pegu, since it was reported to be immensely rich; but that was as far as things went, save that Portuguese adventurers soon began to find their way into the service of Burmese rulers and to play an important part in their struggles, especially with Arakan and Siam. Burma commodities, exported via Martaban, could be purchased at Malacca. The country produced no articles of fine

workmanship comparable to those of China and Japan, and the time had not yet come when the value of its teak-wood forests for shipbuilding was realized by Europeans.

On the other hand, Burmese struggles with Arakan, the Shans and Siam, which reached a high pitch of intensity in the 16th century, caused Portuguese gunners and seamen to be in great demand. Arakan, Pegu and Siam alike employed them as mercenaries. Tabin Shwe Hti employed a Portuguese mercenary leader, João Cayeyro, and his band of 700 followers in 1541, when engaged upon the reduction of all that remained of the old independent Kingdom of Pegu. When they attacked Martaban, it was defended by a rival Portuguese adventurer, Paulo Seixas, who commanded a band of 100 men. A few years later, when he invaded Arakan, he employed another Portuguese band under Diogo Soarez de Mello, whose exploits are related in detail in the famous de Barros-Couto chronicle of Portuguese eastern adventure, *Da Asia*.<sup>1</sup> In 1548 de Mello and five other Portuguese captains accompanied the Burmese army in its onslaught upon the Siamese capital, Ayuthia. They failed to take the city because it was too well defended by another band of Portuguese mercenaries under Diogo Pereira.

Tabin Shwe Hti's reign came to a sudden and tragic end. He came completely under the influence of a young Portuguese favourite, who debauched him so thoroughly with wine that his son, Bayinnaung, had to take matters into his own hands and deal with the rebellions that broke out all over the kingdom. He in turn relied upon de Mello and his mercenaries to crush the great Mon rising, that at this critical juncture threatened to oust the Toungoo dynasty from Pegu. Once again de Mello had to fight against a band of his own compatriots, who were employed by the rebel Mons.

Braginoco, as the Portuguese rendered Bayinnaung's name, revived the greatness of Burma, and under him Pegu became a famous city, the resort of the travellers and traders of many nations. The Portuguese considered him one of the most powerful kings in Asia, and other Europeans who visited his court were equally impressed with his greatness. It seems probable, indeed, that even when due allowance has been made for exaggeration, the kingdom established by Tabin Shwe Hti and Bayinnaung in the 16th century attained to a degree of wealth, magnificence and power never since achieved, even by the Alaungpaya dynasty of the late 18th century.

<sup>1</sup>Decade vi, Book I.

Bayinnaung styled himself King of Kings. He rebuilt his capital city on a much grander scale, with twenty gates named after the vassal states which owed him allegiance. As a devout Buddhist he built many pagodas, and in particular the Mahazedi at Pegu, where he enshrined precious relics sent to him by the rulers of Colombo and Kandy in Ceylon. They were fakes, but he refused to listen to sceptics. He repaired the Shwe Dagon pagoda at what later became Rangoon, and added a new spire to it.

In 1566 Goa was at war with the King of Jafanapatam, whose capital, Kandy, was captured and looted. Among the booty was the famous Tooth of Gautama Buddha, one of the most revered relics throughout the Buddhist world. Bayinnaung had already sent rich presents to the shrine; and ambassadors went there annually from Pegu to pay his respects and see that lights were kept burning on his behalf before the sacred relic. The Tooth was taken by the Portuguese to Goa. In due course a Burmese embassy appeared offering a large sum of money for it. Opinion at Goa was divided.

Many of the captains counselled acceptance of the Burmese offer, and asked to be employed in conveying the Tooth to Pegu. They saw themselves making fortunes by exhibiting it on the journey. The clergy at Goa were horrified at the suggestion that the pioneers of the Catholic crusade against pagan idolatry should in any way be concerned in furthering an accursed superstition. Hence, after long and heated debate, it was decided utterly to destroy the Tooth by first grinding it to powder and then burning the powder. This solemn rite was publicly performed by the Archbishop himself in the presence of the horrified Burmese envoys. The soldiers had warned the clergy that should this be done, the Buddhists would invent a new tooth. Actually they invented two, each claiming to be the original.

Living at a seaport Bayinnaung realized the value of commerce, and under his rule the regulations under which foreign merchants operated were liberal and businesslike. The majestic ceremonial of his court, the spaciousness of his city and the seeming vastness of his armed forces struck wonder into the heart of every foreign visitor, so that the Venetian Caesar Fredericke, who was there in 1569, wrote: "He far exceeds the power of the Great Turk in treasure and strength."

His weakness lay in his foreign policy. He frittered away the strength of his kingdom in costly invasions of Siam, nominally

because the King of Ayuthia possessed seven white elephants to his own four. History, however, abounds with examples of states which, in the hour of unification and liberation from foreign yoke, have adopted an expansionist policy. It was inevitable that the Burmese, having freed themselves from Shan bondage, should seek to destroy the greatest of the Shan states. But it was disastrous to embark upon such a policy before giving a really effective centralized administration to the homeland. And Bayinnaung had failed to do this: he ruled his country mainly through vassal princes. As soon as his strong hand was removed, these all rebelled against his weaker successor, Nanda Bayin, and the country was again plunged into chaos.

Instead of concentrating upon home affairs Nanda Bayin ruined his kingdom by further fruitless attacks upon Siam. The Irrawaddy delta, the richest agricultural district in Indo-China, suffered horribly. Famine, constant requisitions of cultivators into the army, and the ravages of counter-attacking Siamese armies, aided by those of Siam's ally, Arakan, soon reduced this fruitful region to a desert. To make matters worse, in 1599-1600 a combined Siamese and Arakanese raid reduced the city of Pegu to ashes and deported thousands of households from its neighbourhood. Jesuit missionaries, who arrived in Burma at that time, paint a grim picture of devastation and starvation. Shorn of her southern provinces of Martaban and Tenasserim, and parcelled out among a warring crowd of robber barons, Burma at the turn of the century presented a happy hunting ground for Portuguese freebooters seeking to carve out domains for themselves.

Thus it was that Felipe de Brito and his *feringhi* in the service of Arakan came to seize the port of Syriam, sixty miles below Pegu, and to plan to make it the base for a new Portuguese dominion. From 1599 to 1613 they held it, until a new, and stronger king arose at Pegu, Anaukpetlun, who revived the power of the Burmese kingship and brought their sorry adventure to a summary end. The revived dynasty was destined to rule Burma until well into the 18th century, but Pegu never recovered its position as a centre of foreign trade. After its destruction in 1600 Syriam took its place as the chief port in Burma, and it was here that in the 17th century the representatives of the Dutch and English East India Companies established their factories. Under Anaukpetlun the Siamese borders were pushed back to Chiengmai in the south-east and Tavoy in

the south. While he lived, the local barons were held in check, and Burma regained some semblance of order. But his successors found the Mons of the south so hostile that they abandoned the 16th century dream of a united national kingship with its centre at Pegu. In 1635 the capital was removed up north to Ava, and, as Mr. Harvey puts it, "The court relapsed into its tribal homeland Upper Burma." Far away from contact with the outside world, it began to adopt an increasingly unfavourable attitude towards foreign traders, and a policy of repression towards the Mons. Such was the power with which the Dutch and the English sought to negotiate trading terms in the 17th century.

## Chapter II

### EUROPE BECOMES AWARE OF BURMA

HUGH CLIFFORD<sup>1</sup> BEGINS HIS BOOK ON THE HISTORY OF THE EXPLORATION of Further India by Europeans with a discussion of the unmerited neglect of Indo-China. He thinks this is due to the fact that it lies midway between India and China, and has therefore been from the earliest times overshadowed by the "immensity and surpassing fascination" of such mighty neighbours. How otherwise can we explain the fact that the real exploration of the interior was not seriously taken in hand until the second half of the 19th century?

The ancient Greeks were until a late period in their history surprisingly ignorant of the eastern world. The invasion of Xerxes, followed somewhat later by the great Greek counter-attacks upon Persia under Alexander the Great, added enormously to the geographical knowledge of Europe. But of anything further east than the Indus no European geographer had any real knowledge, until in the 3rd century B.C. the Greek Megasthenes crossed India from the Indus to the Ganges by the "royal road," and visited the capital of Chandragupta Maurya. The first attempt to describe lands to the east of the Ganges came from the pen of Pomponius Mela in 43 A.D. Up to his day European geographers had believed, with Eratosthenes, that the Ganges flowed into the sea at the extreme eastern coast of the world. Mela wrote vaguely about a small island of Chryse ("the golden") which lay off a headland named Tamus off the south-eastern extremity of Asia. He also mentioned that the eastern end of Asia was inhabited by a people called the "Seres." The name comes from the Greek word for silk, *σιρεν*, a commodity which had for some time been making its way from China into the Mediterranean world.

The elder Pliny, in the first century A.D., seems to have been the first European writer to mention the south-west monsoon. By his day a direct sea-route had been opened between Alexandria and India, and a very important trade was in process of development.

<sup>1</sup>Hugh Clifford: *Further India* (London, 1904).





THE RUINS OF PAGAN SHOWING THE HAPYANU TEMPLE

Italy was able to gather valuable information about Ceylon from ambassadors sent there by the Emperor Claudius, and mentions trading relations between its inhabitants and the "Seres". How these were carried on, whether by sea through the Straits of Malacca or overland across Indo-China, he does not say; nor does he tell us anything about "Chryse".

In the next century a sailor, named Alexander, sailed to the Malay Peninsula and beyond. His account of his travels was written up by Marinus of Tyre and subsequently utilized by the great astronomer and geographer, Ptolemy, in the composition of his *Geographia*, the work which dominated geographical ideas in Europe until the Renaissance. Educated people in the Mediterranean world had long spoken of a mysterious "Golden Chersonese," far away in the east, from which came fabulous riches. Ptolemy definitely placed it on the far side of the Indian Ocean, so that it was generally identified with the Malay Peninsula by later geographers, a theory which seemed to be confirmed late in the 19th century when immense gold mines of ancient date were discovered in the state of Pahang. But, on the analogy of the Mediterranean Sea itself, Ptolemy thought that the Indian Ocean was entirely enclosed by a great southern continent, upon which the land of the "Sinae" (i.e., Southern Chinese) was situated. An Alexandrian Greek monk of the 6th century, Cosmas Indicopleustes, actually demonstrated the falseness of this idea, and was the first European to write of China with some notion of geographical fact. But his work contained so much nonsense—he tried to prove that the universe was shaped after the model of the Ark of the Lord made by the Israelites in their desert wanderings—that no one took much notice of his real contribution to knowledge.

Although after the decline of the Roman Empire the Khalifs of Baghdad became for centuries supreme in the Indian Ocean and Mohammedan colonies were scattered all over the eastern world, it is a surprising fact that the Arabian geographers do not seem to have improved much upon Ptolemy's ideas. Arabian sea routes round the Indian Ocean followed a well-beaten track almost exactly identical with that pursued by the sailor Alexander. Thus the route of ships sailing from India to China was to touch at Ceylon and the Nicobars then cross to the N.E. extremity of Sumatra. Sometimes they would proceed next to a port on the Malay Peninsula, whence via the island of Bentan and the Natuna group, where they took in

fuel and fresh water, they passed on to the eastern shores of the Malay Peninsula, or Siam or Cambodia, or even to some port in South China. Their notions of these regions, so far as they appear in contemporary writings or maps, were vague and imperfect.

Throughout all this period Burma, in any definitely identifiable shape, never enters the picture. Not until the days of Marco Polo, at the close of the 13th century, were Europeans made aware of its existence. Young Marco travelled with his father and uncle to the court of Kublai Khan at Shangtu in 1271-1275. There they remained for 17 years. Marco became a useful diplomatic agent to the Khan. In this capacity, as an imperial official, he was sent to northern Burma to arrange for the organization of the territory conquered by the expeditions of 1282-1284. From his vague description of his itinerary it is impossible to say whether he got any further than Tagaung. He calls the country "Mien", the Chinese equivalent of the Burmese "Myanma", and describes its court city, also called "Mien", as a great and noble one with marvellous towers, built of stone to a height of fifty feet, covered one with gold, the other with silver plating, and hung round with gilded and silvered bells that tinkled in the wind. He also describes the war waged by Kublai Khan against the "King of Mien and Bangola". Whether Polo confused Bengal with Pegu we cannot say, but it is probable that the King of Burma arrogated the title of "King of Bengal".

Marco Polo tells the story of the battle of Ngasaunggyan, which took place in the Namti Valley in 1277, and described how the Tartar archers won it by causing panic among the King of Burma's elephants. It is an interesting glimpse into one of the critical periods in Burma's history, when the old Burmese power, based upon Pagan, was on the point of collapse. He gives also a very brief glimpse into one of the semi-independent Laos States, on the eastern border of Burma, where the king has three hundred wives. There are large quantities of gold there, many kinds of spices and abundance of elephants. The people drink wine made from rice, and tattoo their bodies all over with figures of beasts and birds in black colouring stuff. How much of this he gathered from personal experience it is impossible to say, but every Burmese boy at puberty is to-day tattooed in this way from his knees to his waist.

Modern scholarship pays high respect to Polo's account of his travels. It forms easily the best survey of the world that mediaeval Europe produced. For the first time Europeans became aware of

the nations bordering the Chinese Empire. For the first time also Burma definitely enters the geographical consciousness of the West. One thing we may note in passing, is that the whole of Indo-China, both mainland and islands, was then much further advanced in wealth and civilization than its present state would suggest. The vast magnificence of the architectural remains at Pagan in Burma, like those of Ayuthia in Siam, Angkor in Kamboja and Borobodor and Brambanan in Java, are the silent witness of a glory that is long past. In Polo's day, however, most people thought the world he described entirely fantastic, and it was a long time before he was taken seriously. One reader, who did take him seriously two centuries later, was Christopher Columbus, whose copy of the book, much annotated in his own hand, is now in the Biblioteca Colombia at Seville. There is also the Catalan Map of 1375 which seems to be the earliest European map reproducing his ideas of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. This was presumably the first European map to include Burma.

After Polo a good few wanderers came to Indo-China before the days of the Portuguese, but not many of them speak of Burma. Probably the chaos of the Shan period, before the rise of the Toungoo dynasty, deterred many would-be visitors. The Franciscan John of Monte Corvino and his immediate successors were mainly interested in planting the Catholic Church in China. The early 14th century Dominican Jordanus went no further than India. The Blessed Odoric of Pordone missed out Burma on his travels to and from China (1318-1330). And as the mounting power of Islam over the Eastern Mediterranean raised up an almost impenetrable barrier between Europe and Asia, the number of Europeans who ventured into these unknown regions became very small indeed.

The next European to visit Burma after Marco Polo was the Venetian Nicolo di Conti. He is said to have been the first white man to set foot in Pegu. Of noble family, as a young man he had resided as a merchant for some time in Damascus. Thence he set out overland for India at some unspecified date, probably before 1420. After wanderings, which took him as far as South China, Sumatra, and Java, he returned home in 1444, and humbly confessed that in order to save his life he had been forced to renounce the Christian religion. The Pope granted him absolution on condition that he should relate his adventures to Poggio Bracciolini, the papal secretary. He visited Tenasserim, which, he said, abounded in

elephants and a species of thrush, presumably the mina. ~~Le~~er he went to Arakan, whence he crossed the Yomas (probably by the An Pass) to a river, which, he said, was larger than the Ganges. Sailing up it for a month he arrived at a city nobler than all the others, called Ava, and fifteen miles in circumference. The country he calls Machin, a corruption of Maha Chin (Great China), the term by which Indians knew all lands east of the Ganges. He mentions the universal custom of tattooing, and is the first European traveller to describe the famous white elephant, which, according to his account, was dust-coloured with unsightly skewbald patches and pink eyes. He wept also to Pegu, which he calls "Panconia", and stayed there four months.

The next European to mention Burma was Athanasius Nitikin, a Russian from Tver, who travelled in the East between 1468 and 1470. He speaks of Pegu as a large port, the trade of which was in the hands of Indian dervishes. But he did not visit the country and his ideas of it were obtained merely from hearsay.

In 1496 another Italian, a Genoese merchant, Hieronomo de' Santo Stefano, landed in Pegu, and was the first European to call it by its proper name. He had gone to the East on a commercial speculation. He stayed in Pegu for a year and a half amidst great privations and annoyances. He had hoped to proceed to Ava, but on account of the war between Pegu and Ava he was unable to do so. He was forced therefore to sell his valuable stock to the king, and was kept waiting eighteen months for payment. While there one of his companions, Hieronomo Adorno, died, and was buried in what he took to be a ruined church.

Santo Stefano was followed shortly afterwards by yet another Italian merchant, Ludovico di Varthema, who also failed to get to Ava, but had an audience of King Binnyaran in the Pegu palace and sold him some coral in return for rubies. He was vastly impressed with the great number of rubies in the king's dress, even in his toes. He describes Pegu as a great city, west of a beautiful river, and containing "good houses and palaces built of stone with lime". The king, he said, was "so humane and domestic that an infant might speak to him". His principal revenue was derived from shellac, sandal-wood, brazil-wood and cotton. After Varthema's visit, which occurred in 1505, we pass from the age of mediaeval wanderers to that of the Portuguese filibusters described in the previous chapter.

The Portuguese, in the words of Clifford<sup>1</sup> swarmed into Asia in a spirit of frank brigandage. The Papal Bulls had divided the newly discovered regions of the earth between Spain and Portugal, and "deeds were wrought in Asia which have done more than aught else to rear up between the brown and white race barriers, which few, even in our own day, have the tact, the patience, the sympathy or the energy to surmount". They settled in Lower Burma chiefly as adventurers, but the power of the newly-united country under the Toungoo dynasty was too great for them to do more than work off their military ardour in the service of its rulers—until the end of the century when Felipe de Brito made his ill-starred attempt to hold Syriam. They also settled in large numbers at Chittagong, then under the rule of Arakan. The Arakanese maintained a large fleet of galleasses. They united with the *feringhi* freebooters and became the terror of the Mughal government of Bengal, raiding up the Sunderbunds delta as far as Dacca and Murshidabad, carrying off thousands of captives, whom they sold into slavery, and levying extensive blackmail.

Few of the filibusters have left accounts of their exploits, but to two of them we are indebted for descriptions of Burma in the 16th century. The first is found at the end of Duarte Barbosa's *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, and is entitled the "Voyage which Juan Serano made when he fled from Malaca, with three Portuguese and Cristoval de Morales of Seville, in a Caravel which he stole in Malaca, in which he put certain Malay mariners, natives of Malaca, about the year of our Lord Jesus Christ one thousand five hundred and twelve years". Unfortunately, Serano's geography is obscure and his description of Pegu useless. He stayed only a short time and sailed off to the Spice Islands, which he evidently found far more interesting.

From such adventurers presumably Duarte Barbosa obtained the materials for the description of Burma which is incorporated in his book. The account is very unreliable, but contains some interesting information regarding commerce. Thus he speaks of the rice trade from Pegu to Malacca and Sumatra, and the export of very fine shellac. Burma shellac was long considered the best procurable anywhere. He shows that the whole external trade of Burma was then in Mahomedan hands (i.e., Arab and Indian). He mentions also the famous Martaban jars, which long after his day were in

<sup>1</sup>Op. cit. pp. 48-50.

great demand for the carriage of water and rice on board the trading ships of those seas. "In this town of Martaban very large and beautiful porcelain vases are made, and some of glazed earthenware, of a black colour, which are highly valued by the Moors, and they export them as merchandise."

The other filibuster, who writes of Burma in the 16th century, is no less a person than Ferdinand Mendes Pinto, whose extravagant account of his own adventures added a new word for falsehood to the European languages. Samuel Purchas had a high opinion of the value of his book and is supported by a number of modern scholars of high repute. But opinions are still divided on this subject. Pinto devotes seven chapters to an account of the wars of Tabin Shwe Hti and Bayinnaung against Siam, Martaban and Prome, but the stories he tells need careful editing.

The Portuguese push into the Indian Ocean was at first largely inspired by the idea of spreading Christianity and of carrying out a great counter-attack against Islam. It is of particular interest, therefore to find that those who settled in Burma actively discouraged missionaries as being likely to destroy their monopoly. Two Dominican missionaries, however, Gaspar de Cruz and Bomferrus, did actually attempt to preach in Burma between 1550 and 1560. They returned to India having completely failed in their mission.

### *Chapter III*

## THE GREAT SIXTEENTH CENTURY PROSPECTORS

THE BEST ACCOUNT OF BURMA IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY COMES from the pen of the Venetian, Caesar Fredericke, who came to the country as a trading prospector in 1569. An English translation of it was published in 1588, and ten years later this was incorporated in Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* along with the narrative of Ralph Fitch, the first recorded Englishman to visit Burma. He was there in 1587 and 1588. It is interesting to compare the two accounts, since Fitch obviously borrowed most of his from the Venetian's extremely competent survey, and even dealt with his subjects in exactly the same order, often using the identical phraseology of Thomas Hickock's translation from the Italian. Where they do differ is in their accounts of their respective itineraries. For instance, Fitch landed first at "Cosmin" (Bassein) and journeyed to Syriam by way of the creeks intersecting the Irrawaddy delta. Caesar Fredericke entered the country by way of Martaban and passed up to Pegu by the Sittang River. Fitch also gives on his own account a faithful picture of the Buddhist monkhood of Burma, which is interesting enough to make us wish that he had written his whole story independently.

Caesar Fredericke's story is so full of interest that it is difficult to handle in a brief survey. But as it is easily accessible in modern reprints of Hakluyt and Purchas it must suffice here merely to draw attention to some of its more important subjects. Here is his description of the royal city of Pegu: "By the helpe of God we came safe to Pegu, which are two Cities, the old and the new, in the old Citie are the Merchant strangers, and Merchants of the Countrie for there are the greatest doings and the greatest trade. This Citie is not very great, but it hath very great suburbs. Their houses are made with canes and covered with leaves, or with straw, but the merchants have all one house or Magason, which house they call *Godon*,<sup>1</sup> which is made of bricks, and there they put all their goods of any value, to save them from the often mischances that there

<sup>1</sup>Godown=a warehouse.

happen to houses made of such stuffe. In the new Citie is <sup>the</sup> Palace of the King and his abiding place with all his Barons and Nobles and gentlemen; . . . it is a great citie, very plaine and flat, and foure square, walled round about, and with ditches which compass the walls about with Water, in which Ditches are many Crocodiles. It hath no Draw-bridges, yet it hath twenty Gates five for every square in the Walls . . . . Within the gate there is a faire large Court, from the one side to the other, wherein there are made places for the strongest and stoutest Elephants, hee hath foure that be white, a thing so rare, that a man shall hardly finde another King that hath any such, as if this King knowe any other that hath white Elephants, he sendeth for them as for a gift. The time that I was there, there were two brought out of a farre Countrie, and that cost me something the sight of them, for that they command the Merchants to goe to see them, and then they must give somewhat to the men that bring them: the Brokers of the Merchants give for every man half a Ducket, which they call a *Tansa*<sup>1</sup> which amounteth to a great summe, for the number of Merchants that are in the Citie."

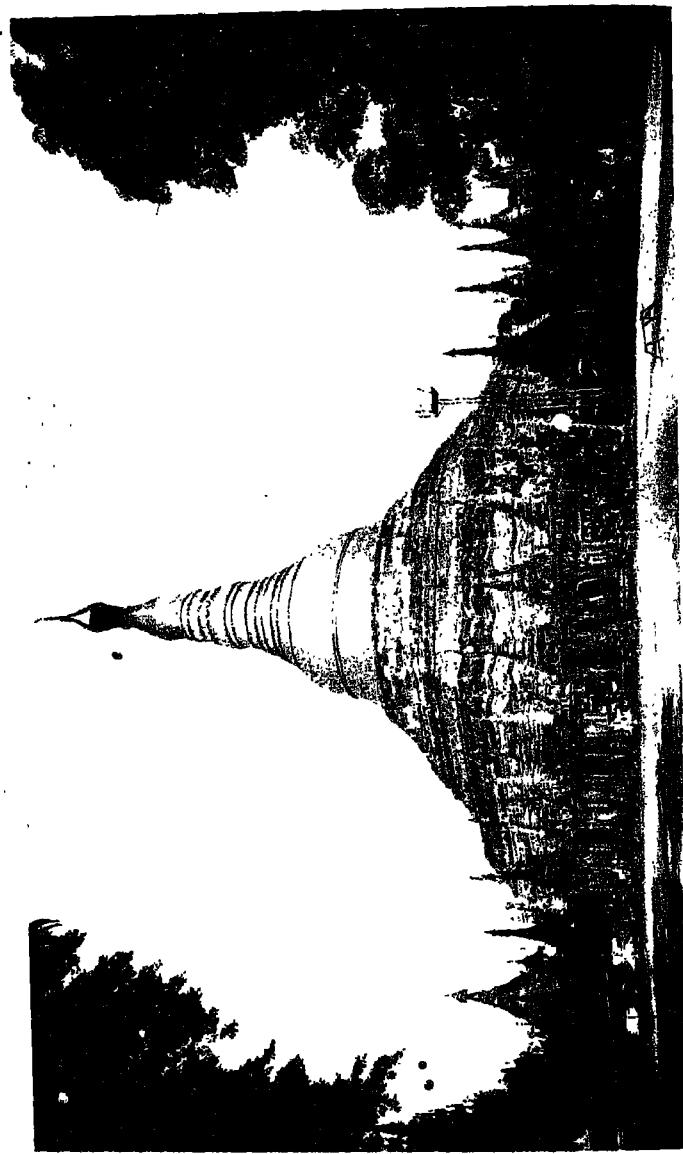
Caesar Fredericke wrote not as a geographer nor even as a traveller recording his impressions and adventures. He was a sober merchant writing a faithful report on commercial conditions and prospects. His little book must have been invaluable as a guide-book for traders. The information contained in it is absolutely reliable. It throws so much light upon the conditions of trade experienced by the Dutch and English merchants in the following century that one cannot refrain from quoting one further section verbatim.

"In the Indies<sup>2</sup> there is not any merchandise that is good to bring to Pegu, unlesse it be at some times by chance to bring Opium of *Cambaya*; and if hee bring money hee shall lose by it. Now the commodities that come from Saint *Tome* are the onely merchandise for that place, which is the great quantitie of Cloth made there, which they use in Pegu; which cloth is made of Bombast woven and painted, so that the more that kinde of Cloth is washed the more lively they shew their colours, which is a rare thing, and there is made such account of this kinde of Cloth, which is of so great

<sup>1</sup>*Tanga*, the Mughal coin which later became the rupee. A corruption of *tanga* is to-day the Burmese word for rupee.

<sup>2</sup>i.e., East Indian archipelago.





SHWE DAGON PAGODA

importance, that a small bale of it will cost a thousand or two thousand duckets. Also from Saint Tome they lade great store of red yarne,<sup>1</sup> of Bombast died with a root which they call *Saia*, as aforesaid, which colour will never out.

"With which merchandise every yeere there goeth a great ship from Saint Tome to Pegu, of great importance, and they usually depart from Saint Tome to Pegu the eleventh or twelfth of September, and if shee stay untill the twelfth, it is a great hap if shee returne not without making her Voyage. Their use was to depart the sixt of September, and then they made sure Voyages, and now because there is a great labour about that kinde of Cloth to bring it to perfection, and that it bee well dried, as also the greedinesse of the Captaine that would make an extraordinary gaine of his freight, thinking to have the winde alwaies to serve their turne, they stay so long, that at sometimes the winde turneth. For in those parts the winds blowe firmly for certain times, with the which they goe to Pegu with the wind in poope, and if they arrive not there before the winde change, and get ground to anchor, perforce they must returne back againe: for that the gales of the winde blowe there for three or foure moneths together in one place with great force. But if they get the coast and anchor there, then with great labour they may save their Voyage.<sup>2</sup>

✓ "Also there goeth another great ship from *Bengala*<sup>3</sup> every yeere, laden with fine cloth of Bombast of all sorts, which arriveth in the Harbour of Pegu, when the ship that commeth from Saint Tome departeth. The Harbour where these two ships arrive is called *Cosmin*.<sup>4</sup>

"From *Malaca* to *Martaran*, which is a Port in Pegu, there come many small ships, and great, laden with Pepper, *Sandola*,<sup>5</sup> *Procellan*<sup>6</sup> of China, *Camfora*,<sup>7</sup> *Bruneo*,<sup>8</sup> and other merchandise.

"The ships that come from *Mecca*<sup>9</sup> enter into the Port of Pegu and *Cirion*,<sup>10</sup> and those ships bring cloth of Wool, Scarlets, Velvets, and Chickinos,<sup>11</sup> by the which they lose, and they bring them because

<sup>1</sup>In great demand for domestic weaving in Burma.

<sup>2</sup>This is a first-rate description of the effect of the monsoons upon sailing conditions between the Coromandel Coast and Burmese ports.

<sup>3</sup>Bengal.

<sup>4</sup>Now Bassein, sixty miles up the western arm of the delta.

<sup>5</sup>Sandalwood.      <sup>6</sup>Porcelain.      <sup>7</sup>Camphor.      <sup>8</sup>Borneo.

<sup>9</sup>Arab dhows from the Red Sea; they still come to Rangoon.

<sup>10</sup>Syriam.

<sup>11</sup>Pieces of gold worth then about 7s. sterling. Venetian Sequins.

they have no other thing that is good for *Pegu*: but they esteem not the losse of them, for that they make such great gaine of their commodities, that they carrie from thence out of that Kingdome.

“Also the King of Assi (Achen) his ships came thither into the same Port laden with Pepper; from the coast of Saint Tome of Bengala out of the Sea of *Bara* to *Pegu* are three hundred miles, and they goe it up the River in foure dayes, with the encreasing water, or with the floud, to a Citie called *Cosmin*, and there they discharge their ships, whither the Customers of *Pegu* come to take the note and markes of all the goods of everyman, and take the charge of the goods on them, and convey them to *Pegu*, into the Kings house, wherein they make the Custome of the merchandise.

“When the Customers have taken the charge of the goods, and put them into Barkes, the Retor of the Citie giveth licence to the Merchants to take barke and goe up to *Pegu* with their Merchandise: and so three or foure of them take a Barke and goe up to *Pegu* in companie. God deliver every man that he give not a wrong note, and entire, or think to steale any Custome: for if they doe, for the least trifile that is, he is utterly undone, for the King doeth take it for a most great affront to bee deceived of his Custome; and therefore they make diligent searches, three times at the lading and unlading of the goods, and at the taking of them a-land. In *Pegu* this search they make when they goe out of the ship for Diamonds, Pearles, and fine Cloth which taketh little roome: for because that all the Jewels that some into *Pegu*, and are not found of that Countrie pay Custome. . . . All Merchants that meane to goe thorow the Indies, must carrie all manner of household stuff with them which is necessary for a house, because that there is not any lodging, nor Innes, nor Hosts, nor chamber roome in that Countrie, but the first thing a man doth when he commeth to any Citie is to hyre a house, either by the yeere, or by the moneth, or as hee meaneas to stay in those parts.”

The old Burmese customs relating to commercial transactions are set down with accuracy. They held good, exactly as Caesar Fredericke described them, for at least a century after his time, and the system of brokerage until long after the British occupation in the 19th century.

“The currant money that is in this Citie<sup>1</sup>, and throughout all this

<sup>1</sup>*Pegu*.

Kingdome is called *Gansa* or *Ganza*,<sup>1</sup> which is made of Copper and Lead: It is not the money of the King but every man may stamp it that will, because it hath his just partition or value: but they make many of them false by putting overmuch lead into them, and those will not passe, neither will any take them. With this money *Ganza*, you may buy Gold or Silver, Rubies and Muske, and other things. For there is no other money currant amongst them. And Gold, Silver and other Merchandize are at one time dearer than another, as all other things bee.

"This *Ganza* goeth by weight of *Byze*,<sup>2</sup> and this name of *Byza* goeth for the account of the weight, and commonly a *Byza* of *Ganza* is worth (after our account) halfe a Ducket, litle more or lesse: and albeit that Gold and Silver is more or lesse in price, yet the *Byza* never changeth: everie *Byza* maketh a hundred *Ganza* of weight, and so the number of the money is *Byza*."<sup>3</sup>

You must buy everything with *ganza*, he goes on to say, and beware of fraud. The usual safeguard adopted by merchants was to employ one of the public assayers of money,<sup>4</sup> at the rate of two viss a month, to check all payments. "That money is verie weightie, for fortie *Byza* is a strong Porters burden: and also where the Merchant hath any paiment to bee made for those goods which hee buyeth, the Common Weigher of money that receiveth his money must make the paiment thereof. So that by this meanes, the Merchant with the charges of two *Byzes* a moneth, receiveth and payeth out his money without losse or trouble." Regarding Burma's exports he says: "The Merchandizes that go out of Pegu are Gold, Silver, Rubies, Saphires, Spinelles, great store of Beniamin, long Pepper, Lead, *Lacca*, Rice, Wine, some Sugar, yet there might be great store of Sugar made in the Countrey, for that they have abundance of Canes, but they give them to Eliphants to eate, and the people consume great store of them for food, and many more do they consume in vaine things."

In view of the incident which led to the first contact between the East India Company and Burma in the following century,<sup>5</sup> one of Caesar Fredericke's staterments on the treatment of foreign merchants is of particular interest. "They that die in the Kingdome of

<sup>1</sup>Often referred to as bell-metal (Sanskrit, *kansa*), a mixture of lead and copper.

<sup>2</sup>The Indian viss, slightly over 3½ lbs. 1 viss of *ganza*=1 *tanga*.

<sup>3</sup>He means that the viss is divided into a hundred parts, but does not seem to realize that these were called 'tikals'.

<sup>4</sup>Burmese *pweza* (broker).

<sup>5</sup>Chapter IV.

*Pegu* lose the third part of their goods by ancient customs of the Countrey, that if any *Christian* dieth in the Kingdome of *Pegu*, the King and his Officers rest heires of a third of his goods, and there hath never been any deceit or fraud used in this matter. I have knowne many rich men that have dwelled in *Pegu*, and in their age they have desired to goe into their own Countrey to die there and have departed with all their goods and substance without let or trouble."

Ralph Fitch set out from England in 1583 with three companions, one of whom, John Newbery,<sup>1</sup> had already travelled a great deal in the Mahomedan lands to the east of the Mediterranean. They sailed on the *Tiger*, later made famous by Shakespeare's reference to it in *Macbeth*, to the Levantine port of Tripoli, whence they made their way by land to the Persian Gulf. Then they crossed to Goa, "the most principal Citie which the *Portugals* have in *India*," where they were arrested as spies. One of them, Story, a painter, was released because the Jesuits needed his services for painting their church. The other three escaped, and pursued their adventurous journey through Golconda to the court of the Emperor Akbar at Fatehpur Sikri. There they separated, Newbery to attempt to return home via Afghanistan and Persia,<sup>2</sup> and Fitch to proceed to Bengal *en route* for Burma; Leeds, the third of the party and an expert in precious stones, remained in the service of the Mogul Emperor.

Late in the year 1586 Fitch embarked at Sripur for Pegu. As we have already seen, he arrived at 'Cosmin', whence he made his way through the creeks to Syriam and on to Pegu. Late in 1587 he made the hazardous journey to Chiengmai, in the Siamese Shan States, about 200 miles north-east of Pegu city; he describes it as an important trading centre for copper, benzoin, musk, gold, silver and Chinese manufactures. In January 1588 he left Pegu for Malacca, where he collected information concerning its trade with China and the Malay Archipelago. After a short stay there he returned to Pegu by way of Martaban. In September he took ship once more from 'Cosmin' for Bengal. Then he made his way home via Ceylon, Cochin, Goa, the Persian Gulf, Baghdad and Aleppo. He arrived in London on 29th April, 1591, to find that his relatives, thinking him dead, had already divided his estate.

<sup>1</sup>Sir William Foster devotes two excellent chapters to this insatiable traveller in *England's Quest of Eastern Trade*, London, 1933.

<sup>2</sup>He died on the way back.

Owing to the danger of having about him incriminating documents in case of further difficulties with the Portuguese, Fitch kept no diary. This probably explains why, when pressed by Hakluyt and others to write up his story, he made such extensive use of Caesar Fredericke's narrative. He was not a good writer, and obviously had only a hazy recollection of dates: but some of his descriptions are vivid, and to anyone who is familiar with Burma there is much of thrilling interest in them. He was vastly impressed by the majestic Shwe Dagon Pagoda, which now dominates the great modern city of Rangoon. "It is the fairest place, as I suppose, that is in the world," he wrote.

Both he and Caesar Fredericke reflect the 'prevailing attitude of their age towards the precious metals. The Spanish discoveries of bullion in Central America had played so important a part in raising the military power of Philip II that most English explorers and trading prospectors of the Elizabethan period were gold hunters. Fitch describes the riches of the King of Pegu with gusto, but adds with scorn that the people waste vast quantities of gold in gilding their pagodas. "If they did not consume their gold in these vanities," he writes, "it would bee very plentiful and good cheape in Pegu."

There is yet another account of Burma in the late 16th century from the pen of a European visitor. He was Gasparo Balbi, a Venetian, who went to Pegu with a stock of emeralds for sale in 1583. He painted a graphic picture of his experiences there, which Hakluyt included in his famous collection. Balbi, like Fitch, sailed there round Cape Negrais and admired the beautiful Hmawdin Pagoda which is still such a landmark. He went up stream to 'Cosmin' and thence through the Myaungnya creeks to Pegu. King Nanda Bayin, Bayin Naung's unworthy successor, was immensely amused by his description of Venice as a free state without a king. He had never heard of such a strange phenomenon. Balbi was the horrified spectator of the cruel massacre of a number of court officials and their families, who were suspected of complicity in a rebellion raised by the Viceroy of Ava against Nanda Bayin.

Throughout the 16th century the Portuguese maintained a wonderful system of secrecy regarding their possessions and trade in the East. But as the century progressed the Protestant powers became more and more determined to break the ring-fence, especially after the absorption of Portugal by Spain in 1580. The efforts of Newbery and Fitch must be partly interpreted in this light. The

defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, coupled with the failure of attempts to discover the North-West Passage, gave a great impulse to schemes for establishing direct trade with the East by the Cape Route. Hence Raymond and Lancaster's expedition in 1591, which was financed by a group of London merchants on the assumption that it should be possible to open up trade with places not under Portuguese control.

The great need was for information. The capture in 1592 of the carrack *Madre de Dios* with a copy of a register of Portuguese trade and government in the East Indies provided the London merchants with what they badly needed. But the greatest service of all came from a Dutchman, Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, who arrived home in 1592 after spending five years at Goa, where, incidentally, he had helped Newbery and Fitch after their arrest. He had compiled a simply astounding record, not only concerning routes to India and the eastern seas, translated from the manuscripts of Spanish and Portuguese pilots, but also of the various countries out there and their commercial products. His *Itinerario* was published in 1596 and was speedily translated into English, German Latin and French.

Linschoten's book revealed to Europe the exciting news that the Portuguese empire in the East was rotten. It stimulated the Dutch to make an instant bid for the rich spice trade of the Malay Archipelago. He directed their attention especially to Java, which they proceeded to make their headquarters. Their hostility to the Portuguese won them the goodwill of the natives, and between 1595 and 1601 no less than 49 Dutch vessels sailed past the Cape bound for Malaya. They were speedily followed by the English, who founded the East India Company in 1600 and planted a factory at Bantam in 1602.

As Fitch was in London at the time when the new company was floated, and was specially consulted concerning the lading of the ships for the first voyage, it is interesting to speculate on the reasons why in its early years the Company made no attempt to open up trade with Burma. They are not far to seek. The English merchants were at first concerned solely with opening up the spice trade; and Burma produced nothing except a little musk. This was clear, not only from the papers published by Hakluyt, but also from the details of Burma products given by Linschoten. Moreover, the English Company was a purely trading concern, which, with no

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hope of active support from its government, could not venture upon a frontal attack against the Portuguese. It sought to avoid contact with all places where they were established. And when the question of the possible scope of its operations was, at Elizabeth's request, referred to Fulke Greville, he stated categorically that Arakan, Pegu and Tenasserim were within the scope of Portuguese operations. Actually, as we have already seen, Felipe de Brito and his *feringhi*, were in possession of the port of Syriam when the earliest English voyages under the Company were undertaken.

Nor must we forget the appalling state of devastation to which the Delta region was reduced after the great raids by the Siamese and Arakanese in 1599-1600. The Jesuit missionaries, Pimenta and Boves, who came to the country in that year, describe the aftermath of the Arakanese raid thus:

"Yet now there are scarcely found in all that kingdom any men . . . for in late times they have been brought to such misery and want, that they did eat man's flesh and kept public shambles thereof, parents abstained not from their children, and children devoured their parents. The stronger by force preyed on the weaker, and if any were but skin and bone, yet did they open their entrails to fill their own and sucked out their brains." (Pimenta.)

"I also went thither with Philip Brito, and in fifteen days arrived at Syriam, the chief port in Pegu. It is a lamentable spectacle to see the banks of the rivers set with infinite fruit-bearing trees, now overwhelmed with ruins of gilded temples and noble edifices; the ways and fields full of skulls and bones of wretched Peguans, killed or famished or cast into the river, in such numbers that the multitude of carcasses prohibits the way and passage of any ship." (Boves.)

John Company was not likely to be attracted to such a scene of desolation.

## *Chapter IV*

### JOHN COMPANY ARRIVES

THE ROMANTIC STORY OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S FIRST CONTACT with Burma is told in a paper<sup>1</sup> written by William Methwold at the request of Samuel Purchas for inclusion in his *Pilgrimes*. It reached Purchas too late, however, for inclusion in his main work, and hence had to be relegated to the end of the supplementary volume issued in 1626. This volume has never been reprinted and copies of the original are very rare. Hence, until recent years the story Methwold tells of the mission, despatched to King Anau-  
petum at Pegu by his predecessor as Chief of the Company's factory, at Masulipatam, was completely unknown to historical writers.

The story links up with the Company's decision to open up trading stations on the Coromandel Coast and in Siam, which inaugurated the second phase in the history of its intercourse with the East. Its first few voyages had proved that the intense competition of the Dutch greatly reduced the profits derived from the spice trade. Hence it was decided in 1610 to purchase a larger variety of eastern goods and explore new markets. The *Globe*, which made the Company's Seventh Voyage, was accordingly directed to engage in the trade of the Bay of Bengal and the Gulf of Siam. The management of the venture was in the hands of two Dutchmen, Peter Floris and Lucas Antheunis, as they were known in England. Floris had previously visited Arakan as the leader of the pioneer Dutch expedition to prospect for trade there, and while at Mrauk-U had seen the daughter of Nanda Bayin of Pegu and his white elephant, part of the booty carried away in the great raid of 1600.

After planting a factory at Masulipatam on the Coromandel Coast in 1611, the expedition passed on to Siam, where trading prospects appeared so good that it was decided to send two factors.

<sup>1</sup>It is entitled *Relations of the Kingdome of Golchonda . . . and the English Trade in those Parts*. An excellent edition of it by Sir William Foster was published by the Hakluyt Society in 1930.

Thomas Samuel and Thomas Driver, up country to the Lao town of Chiengmai with a consignment of goods for sale. These two men began their long journey inland early in 1613, the year in which King Anaukpetlun of Burma put an end to de Brito's adventure at Syriam and began a series of attacks upon the former Burmese possessions, acquired by Siam during the wars at the end of the previous century. He reduced Martaban and Tavoy in succession. Then, having failed in his attempt upon Tenasserim, he led an expedition in 1615 against Chiengmai, captured it, placed a vassal ruler over it, and returned to Pegu with prisoners and booty, among them Thomas Samuel and the unsold remainder of his goods.<sup>1</sup>

Samuel was well treated at Pegu, where he was permitted to carry on trade. But he died soon after his arrival and his property was taken over by the Burmese government, which drew up an inventory of his goods and collected his debts. When news of this reached Masulipatam in 1617 through Mahommedan merchants, who regularly traded between that place and Syriam, Lucas Antheunis was chief of the factory there. As he had been one of the largest shareholders in Samuel's expedition, he decided to send two of his factors, Henry Forrest and John Staveley, to Pegu to claim the restoration of the property. They sailed from Masulipatam on 10th September, 1617, on board a ship belonging to the King of Golconda, bearing a present with which to introduce themselves to Anaukpetlun.

Their early letters, quoted in full by Methwold, give a detailed account of their reception by the Burmese authorities, the King's brother at Syriam, and the King himself at Pegu. Anaukpetlun was evidently pleased by their arrival, since he was most anxious for the Company to open trade with his dominions. But the factors were horrified to find that all foreign merchants, who set foot in Burma, became technically royal slaves, unable to leave the country without express royal permission. "The Country is far from your worship's expectation," they wrote, "for what men soever come into his Country, he holds them but as his slaves, neyther can any man goe out of his country without his leave, for he hath watch both by Land and Water, and he of himself is a Tyrant, and can joynt eat before he hath drawne bloud from some of his people with death or otherwise."

<sup>1</sup>Driver had managed to get through to Ayuthia before the Burmese invested Chiengmai.

When application was made for the restoration of Samuel's goods, the factors were put off with "many faire speeches". Finally they were told that as soon as the English sent ships to trade with Burma, the goods would be handed over, and anything else they might desire. Meanwhile it became obvious that the King intended to hold them as hostages in order to force the Company's hand. Their letters became more and more pitiful; "We intreat you for God's sake to be mindfull of us, and to pitty the poore estate wee are here in, and send some Ship to release us, and wee shall be bound to pray for your Worships good health and prosperitie."

They had taken over with them a consignment of Indian piece-goods for sale in order to defray the expenses of the journey. According to Methwold they sold it profitably, but lost most of the proceeds at play. They also borrowed profusely. In April, 1619, their house was burnt down, and they were about to make another attempt to obtain royal permission to depart, when the discovery of a wide-spread plot against Anaukpetlun's life caused so much disturbance that they dared not take the matter up. This delayed them a whole year, since, as Caesar Fredericke had shown, there was only one sailing season across the Bay to Burma, namely outwards at the change over from the south-west to the north-west monsoon and back again just before the break of the wet monsoon. Methwold puts it very clearly: "In September the Ships (of Golconda) for Achyne, Arrecan, Pegu and Tannassery set all sayle, for it is to be understood that amongst this and all other Coasts of India, the windes blow constantly trade sixe moneths one way and sixe moneths another: which they call the Monsons, alternately succeeding each other, not missing to alter in Aprill and October, onely variable towards their end, so that taking the last of a monson, they set sayles, and with a forewinde arrive at their desired haven, and there negotiating their affaires, they set sayle from thence in February or March following, and with the like favourable gale return in Aprille unto their own Ports."

The veracity of the messages the two factors sent through to Methwold at Masulipatam, concerning their failure to return, is open to grave doubt, since in the end when they did return, in 1620, they seem to have left Burma unwillingly under orders from the King. He handed over Samuel's property to them, but not until they were on the point of departure, "lest their ryot should have

consumed all," grimly remarks Methwold. On the way over they forged a fresh set of accounts and threw overboard their original papers. Forrest twice attempted to run away after their arrival at Masulipatam, "a yearie villane, debaucht, most audacious and dishonest," Methwold wrote home. They were sent under arrest to the Company's head factory to Jaccatra in Java, whence they were shipped home in disgrace, to be summarily dismissed by their employers. The amount realized from Samuel's estate after paying expenses was about £193. With it Methwold bought some diamonds and shellac, which he forwarded to England on board the *Charles*.

Along with Forrest and Staveley King Anaukpetlun sent to Masulipatam what Methwold describes as a letter, "written on a Palmito Leaf, signifying his desire to give free Trade and entertainment to the English nation, if they would with their shipping repaire unto his Country." This was accompanied by a ruby ring, two mats, two betel boxes and two pieces of damask. He was by no means enthusiastic to follow up the King's invitation to open regular trading relations, nor was the Company in a position to do so. The Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1619, by which the two nations were to share the trade of the East, and the English were committed to a heavy contribution towards the defence of the Dutch factories and the maintenance of their war against the Portuguese, imposed an intolerable strain upon the finances and shipping of the Company. Hence the Batavia Presidency under which Masulipatam operated, was forced to abandon many of its trading ventures. The massacre of Amboyna in 1623 was a further serious blow, and by the end of that year the English factories in Patani, Pulicat, Siam and Hirado (Japan) were all closed. So the oft-quoted passage in Dalrymple's *Oriental Repertory*, which asserts that at this time they established factories at Syriam, Prome, Ava and Bhamo in Burma, must be taken as a bad guess. Not until 1647 did John Company establish his first factory in the "land of peacocks and pagodas".

A few English traders did indeed visit Burma in the period before official trade was opened, but they were either interlopers or seafaring men in the employment of Indian merchants. Some of the Company's servants even were mixed up in this clandestine trade, notably a certain Henry Sill, of the Aragon factory, who carried on an extensive business in Indian piece-goods with Pegu, Arakan

and Tenassering, through Indian agents. Some of these ventures brought great profits, so that from time to time a Company's agent on the Coromandel Coast would receive instructions to inquire into the possibilities of opening up the trade. But one great deterrent to such operations lay in the ravages of the *seringhi* pirates in the pay of Arakan, against which the English were hard put to defend their trade in the Bay of Bengal.

## *Chapter V*

### **ANGLO-DUTCH RIVALRY IN BURMA**

IN 1639 THE COMPANY'S DIRECTORS SENT OUT ORDERS TO THE Masulipatam factory to send a ship to Pegu to 'make trial' of the trade there. Whether this ship was ever sent there is no record, but the Masulipatam factors reported strongly against such a rash procedure, which, they wrote, would be equivalent to sending it "into the Lyons clawes, we meeane with our competitours the Dutch." As soon as the Dutch planted factories on the Coromandel Coast, they became aware of the possibilities of competing with the Indian merchants, who up till then had practically monopolised the extensive export of Indian textiles from that region to Burma and Arakan. Their earliest ventures were to Arakan. But a great famine which extended round the Bay of Bengal in 1631 caused a temporary stoppage to this trade. In 1634, however, they not only returned to Arakan, but also sent the *Vlielant* to open up trade with Pegu, and a further expedition to prospect in Tenasserim. They had already opened up trade with Bengal, and their policy now aimed at following out a concerted plan of campaign for gaining complete control over the trade of the Bay of Bengal. Their Coromandel factories were the pivot of this great enterprise, which was placed by Batavia under the directing agency of the Governor of Pulicat. These factories exploited the manufacture of Indian textiles for all they were worth, and kept a vast number of weavers and dyers busy in adjoining towns and villages. Batavia needed huge supplies of rice, hence their main source of interest in Pegu. But they were also anxious to tap the supplies of precious stones, shellac and tin, which could be obtained there.

The Dutch factors, Dirck Steur and Wiert Jansen Popta, on arrival at Syriam were confronted with an unexpected and perplexing situation. King Thalun was in the process of removing his capital up country from Pegu to Ava, and there was no prospect of trade with Lower Burma. They had to send their main consignment of

goods up to the new capital, where prospects at first looked pretty black. The great famine, which had begun in 1631, had impoverished the country, large numbers of people were still dying of starvation and trade was at a standstill.

The Dutch, however, were extremely well received by the King, who staged for them "sundry spectacles of dancing, leaping and fighting" at his new palace. This was in striking contrast to the treatment accorded to a Portuguese mission which arrived at the same time. They managed to procure some gold, musk, tin and rubies, but the entry in the *Daghregister* of Batavia, recording the results of the enterprise, classes them as "a scanty return."

Meanwhile, an incident had occurred, which, judging from the records, must have been a fairly common one in those days. While the Dutch factors were being entertained so graciously by King Thalun, a party of shipwrecked sailors, composed of twelve Dutchmen and twelve lascars, turned up at Syriam in a pitiable plight. According to the custom of the country they were claimed as royal slaves and attached to the household of a patron. It cost the Dutch very heavily in bribes to secure the manumission of their compatriots, but the King refused to free the lascars. He made it clear that in liberating the white men he was doing something entirely unprecedented. There were four other Dutch captives at Ava, the survivors of the crew of a small ship wrecked off the coast of Burma fourteen years earlier. But the King refused all requests to set them free; he indicated that this might be considered if the Dutch continued to send ships to his country for trade.

The Dutch soon found that Upper Burma abounded in supplies of saltpetre, and the Governor of Pulicat conceived the notion of persuading the King to permit them to manufacture gunpowder there. He was not long in discovering that no foreigner was permitted to utilize that combustible material save in the service of the King, and that any attempt to smuggle saltpetre out of the country was punishable by death. Every king of Burma lived under constant threats of rebellion. Moreover, the Portuguese behaviour all over the East had taught people that foreigners could be very dangerous. Hence it was a cardinal point of Burmese policy that all foreign ships entering their ports must surrender their guns and ammunition for the period of their stay there.

Dutch trade in Burma fluctuated considerably. In the year 1639

profits were estimated at over 80,000 florins. But in the following year hot competition from Indian merchants caused them to drop to just over 30,000 florins. In 1642 they dropped to under 25,000 florins, while there were bad debts to the extent of 50,000 florins. The Dutch complained bitterly of the capricious behaviour of the royal officials, who were remunerated purely on a system of perquisites. The King was the chief merchant in his country, and had a very disturbing practice of making a royal monopoly of any article in which he was interested. The ruby merchants cheated, and the indigo workers employed by the Dutch were most unreliable. By 1642 they were beginning to wish they had never planted a factory in Burma. They complained to the King, who replied that they were destroying the trade of his country by their hostility to all competitors, especially the Portuguese. He said that their failure in the ruby trade was due to the ignorance of the factors they employed. He also had a grievance, namely, that he had never yet received any letter or present from their king.

Trade improved for a while, but in 1645 the Dutch were so dissatisfied that the abandonment of the factories was actually sanctioned by Batavia. They remained there, however, and evidently improved their position very considerably, for when the English opened factories in Burma in 1647 they were greatly impressed by the strong hold the Dutch had obtained over the trade of the country.

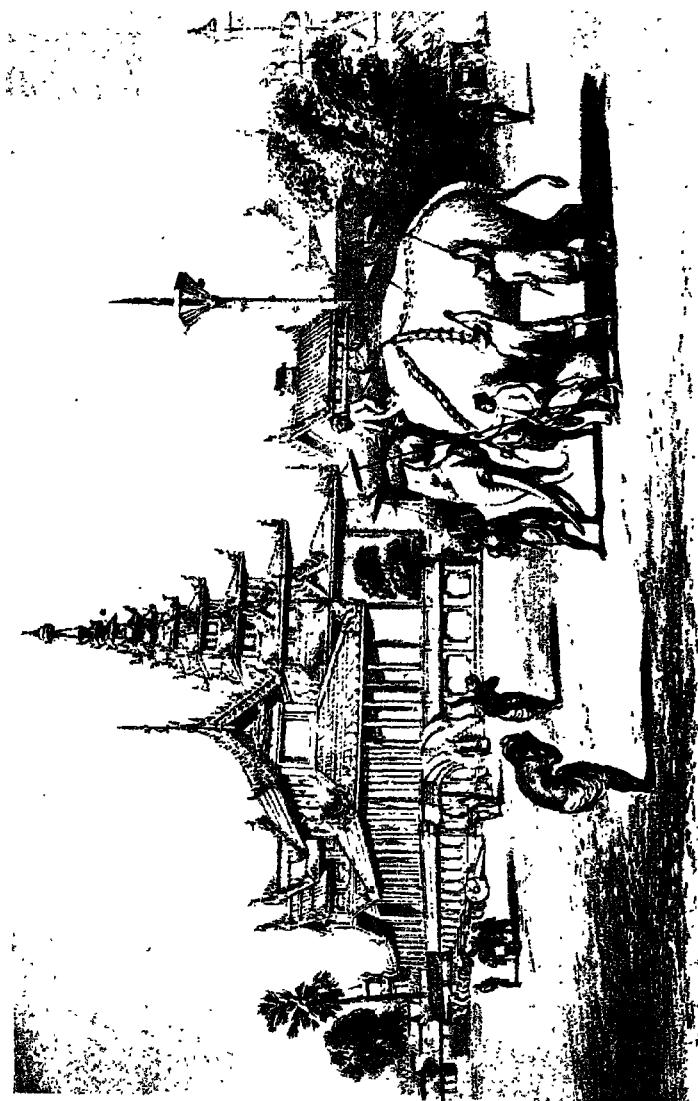
The English company's decision to begin operations in Burma was partly due to the rumours of Dutch prosperity there and partly to a temporary failure in their Persian trade. It was a gamble, undertaken at a time when the Company's struggle with the Courten Association, coupled with the Great Civil War at home, had caused the Directors to order their Presidents at Bantam and Surat to prepare to wind up its affairs in the East. The venture was organized by the new factory, Fort St. George, planted at Madras in 1639, and was financed by an accommodating Indian financier, Virji Vora. In September 1647 the *Endeavour* left the Coromandel Coast for Syriam having on board Thomas Breton, chief factor, his assistants, Richard Potter and Richard Knipe, and a cargo of goods valued at 20,836 rials of eight. Potter had previously been to Burma—on a private trading venture. The others apparently knew nothing of the country they set out to visit.

On arrival they found themselves up against the usual difficulties. The country between Syriam and Ava was in the throes of one of its periodical rebellions, and until this was put down, they could not start upon the long tedious journey upstream to the capital. Customs duties were 16½ per cent, "and that required *in specie*, with more strictness than we have ever seen in any other place." They had to sell through brokers, who required not less than seven months' credit. The climate was "very unhealthful" and they longed for the taste of "sack and beare". On the way up to Ava one of the boatmen, while cooking curry and rice in the early morning, set fire to his boat and much valuable stock was irreparably damaged, and an English sailor fell overboard and was drowned. Nevertheless business was good and in 1650 it was reported home that, after making allowances for all losses, the profits of the venture would amount to about 40 per cent if there were no bad debts.

For a time things went well, and the Coromandel Coast factors bought and fitted out a ship specially for the Burma trade, naming it the *Ruby*. The King was favourable, and sent Fort St. George a present of a ruby ring and a "small Goulden Bull with more eyes than hee should have through the thinness of the mettle". But in 1652 the first Anglo-Dutch War began and soon all the English factories in the East were in a most uncomfortable position. The Dutch possessed a commanding naval superiority over the English in the Indian Ocean. It was not long before they had captured or destroyed several English ships and were blockading the rest in various ports. English trade was literally brought to a standstill. The Dutch in Burma, unable to use active violence against the English, did their best "to render us odious to the people". They also very effectively bottled up the Company's ship, the *Expedition*, in Syriam harbour. By lavish bribery too they won over the support of the Ava government, and English prospects in Burma became hopeless.

At the close of the war the English company's affairs were in a critical condition. It could not raise adequate capital to start its trade going again, the Commonwealth government was hostile to its monopoly, and interlopers easily flouted all its attempts to restrict their activities. Hence it was decided to close a large number of factories, among them those in Burma. Accordingly two of the factors in that country were ordered to return to Madras on a Dutch ship, while the third was to remain behind merely for the purpose





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of collecting outstanding debts. William Jearsey, one of the two ordered to return, refused to go on a Dutch ship, and insisted upon travelling by an English vessel, "for the Credit of the Nation (as hee said)." But it was discovered that the English vessel in question was engaged in private trade on behalf of Jearsey and certain associates of his at Madras. Long after the English factories in Burma had closed down in 1657, he continued to carry on private trade with that country, and, judging by the references to him in the *Daghregister*, he was somewhat of a thorn in the flesh to the Dutch. Formal title to the Syriam factory site was never actually relinquished by the English. When, however, Cromwell's reorganization of the East India Company, and its subsequent prosperity in the sunshine of Charles II's royal favour, rendered expansion once more the order of the day, Siam, which offered better treatment to foreign merchants, was preferred as a base for English trade in Indo-China. The Dutch were left masters of the field in Burma.

The Dutch, however, were still not at all happy about their trade there. Chinese freebooter armies throughout this period were a source of great trouble to the Burmese. The Ming dynasty had been overthrown in 1644. When the last of the dynasty, Yung-li, was driven out of Yunnan, he took refuge in Burma with 700 followers. They were disarmed by the Burmese and allowed to settle at Sagaing. But their presence in Burma caused a spate of Chinese invasions by freebooters on the excuse of trying to rescue the Ming leader. These raids caused so much disturbance in the neighbourhood of Ava that trade was often seriously affected. There was also a Mon rebellion in the Martaban region. King Pindale (1648-1661) proved so incompetent to deal with this situation that at last in desperation his brother, Pye, seized the throne and drowned Pindale, his queen and their son in the River Irrawaddy. Then at last things quieted down and Dutch trade "began to get its breath again", as they expressed it. But their outstanding debts were enormous and net profits almost negligible. Their trade, however, did improve, and in 1663 they were able to estimate their profits at nearly 47,000 florins.

Dutch imports into Burma were mainly Indian piece-goods. Crimson and scarlet colours were much in demand; red yarn also was sold in very large quantities. Most of the stuffs were of cotton, but a Madras-woven silk called *alegia patchery* is mentioned in many bills of lading. From Burma they exported gold, tin, shellac, ele-

phant-teeth, long pepper and some Chinese goods. Burma rubies were in great demand, but as the Burmese placed an excessive value on stones of the first water the trade languished. The Dutch and the English private traders also smuggled much ganza out of the country in ships fitted with double bottoms. The profits of this smuggling trade were enormous, but sometimes the smugglers were caught. Then their cargoes were confiscated and they had to bribe their way out of gaol. William Jearsey—"Meester Sjersy," as they referred to him—played a big part in this smuggling game. So ultimately did the Dutch factors, on their own private account and to the detriment of their company's official trade. This is the sort of thing that occurred: Pulicat would ask for a cargo of smuggled ganza; the Burma factors would reply that they were unable to pass any out of the country; but the ship bringing the letter would have a large consignment of "private" ganza on board, which would be sold for their private profit. Operations like this seriously reduced the profits of the factory, and on one occasion the Governor of Pulicat even sent over a commission of enquiry.

The Dutch factors in Ava developed also a large clandestine trade with Chinese merchants from Yunnan. It was not long before they came to realize the immense possibilities of opening up trade with Western China through the town of Bhamo, in later days a focal point on one arm of the famous "Burma Road". Out of this project a quarrel developed between the Dutch and the Court of Ava, which brought about a final breach in 1679 and the closing down of their factories. The Burmese government prohibited their direct trade with Chinese merchants. The Dutch asked permission to establish a factory on the Chinese frontier and to have reasonable freedom of trade. The Burmese refused. Dalrymple tells us that the Dutch then threatened to bring the Chinese into Burma, whereupon they were officially expelled. Their own records contain no suggestion that this was the manner of their exit; it looks like another bad guess on Dalrymple's part.

Their withdrawal, as on a previous occasion in Arakan, was planned with all secrecy and carried out suddenly. They could not have got either themselves or their property out of the country in any other manner. The incident had an amusing sequel. Some weeks after they had flitted, a Dutch ship, which had been sent to assist with their evacuation, turned up in Syriam harbour. It was immediately seized by the local authorities; the captain only

managed to get safely away through the good offices of a Danish private merchant there and the liberal ~~application~~<sup>1</sup> of palm-grease. He reported afterwards that he had had "much sport with the hair-brained Peguers". Knowing the sort of dance they must have led him, it is intriguing to speculate on the sort of dance he must have led them. Or was the word 'sport' a euphemism?

## *Chapter VI*

### THE LAND OF THE GREAT IMAGE

THE HEADING OF THIS CHAPTER IS BORROWED FROM THE TITLE OF a book from the pen of Mr. Maurice Collis recounting the strange adventures of an Augustinian friar of Oporto, Sebastião Manrique, at the Court of Arakan in the early part of the seventeenth century. This delightful work incidentally has much to say about the exploit of the Portuguese filibusters in the service of Arakan and paints a vivid picture of Portuguese India in the days when, with its glory sadly tarnished, it was on the brink of its spectacular decline before the Dutch onslaught. In the next few pages we shall study not only Portuguese but also Dutch activities in Arakan, and sometimes catch glimpses of their interplay.

Late in the year 1629 Manrique was appointed vicar of the district of Dianga, now in Eastern Bengal, then under the Arakanese viceroyalty of Chittagong. Here he lived and worked for a time among the motley crowd of *feringhis*, whose slave-raids were the terror of the Ganges delta regions, and provided the King of Arakan with the slaves, whom in the next period he sold to Dutch traders for shipment to Batavia. The *feringhis*, whose ruffianly exploits colour so much of Arakanese history for nearly a century, were entirely independent of any control from Goa, the centre of Portuguese power in the East. They were used by Arakan for the purpose of harrying the eastern borders of the Mughal Empire, which not only flouted Arakanese claims to Eastern Bengal, but aimed ultimately at driving them out of Chittagong. Without their aid the Arakanese could never have held on to this purely Indian province as long as they did. At the same time, however, the *feringhis* there made themselves such a thorn in the side of the Mughal power, that it was bound sooner or later to root them out.

The Portuguese also formed a regiment in the King of Arakan's bodyguard, and individuals from among them often rose to high positions of state. Felipe de Brito was one of these. He married a niece of the Viceroy of Goa, and took charge at Syriam, theoreti-

cally as Governor on behalf of the King of Arakan, after the great raid of 1599. His chief associate in this adventure, Salvador Ribeiro de Sousa, was an officer in the Arakanese forces, but without political ambitions, who afterwards returned to his native country and settled down there for the remainder of his life.

One of the most picturesque of these adventurers was Sebastião Gonzales Tibao, a man of low birth from a tiny village near Lisbon, who served as a soldier in Bengal, then bought a small vessel and engaged in the salt trade. In this capacity he came to Dianga in 1607. The ambitious de Brito was at the time planning to obtain possession of the place, in order, so it was rumoured, to use it as a base for the conquest of Arakan. The King of Arakan, however, sent up an expedition which massacred hundreds of the *feringhis* there. Tibao managed to escape, and with other refugees, took to piracy, and raided the Arakan coasts. In 1609 they seized the island of Sandwip, off the Chittagong coast, and Tibao became its "king". He made it an important trading centre and amassed a huge fortune. He married a sister of the Governor of Chittagong, who had quarrelled with his overlord and rebelled. He was in a wonderful position to blackmail the King of Arakan. So dangerous did he become that the King had to make peace with him. The Mughal Governor of Bengal was threatening the Arakanese settlement at Noakhali, at the mouth of the Ganges. It was arranged that Tibao should unite his forces with the Arakanese fleet in an attack upon Bengal. The campaign failed, but Tibao gained possession of the whole Arakanese flotilla by massacring all its leaders. He raided right up to the outskirts of Mrauk-u, the Arakanese capital, and burnt the royal barge.

Now, however, he had both Bengal and Arakan against him. Nothing daunted, he applied to Goa for help, suggesting a joint attack upon Arakan. The Viceroy sent a fleet and in 1615 an attack was made on Mrauk-u. It failed because the Arakanese secured the help of some Dutch ships. The Goa fleet sailed away, and ultimately in 1617 the Arakanese captured Sandwip. From this time onwards the *feringhi* were nominally the servants of the King of Arakan, and concerned themselves mainly with slave raids into the Ganges delta. In this way they could at least plead the excuse that they were preventing the spread of the great infidel Moslem power which ruled India. The extent of their raids may be gathered from Manrique's statement that on the average they brought no,

less than 3,400 slaves every year to Dianga. A Mughal writer<sup>1</sup> tells us that ultimately not a house was left inhabited on either side of the rivers leading from Chittagong to Dacca. One may speculate upon the shocks that life in such a community must have afforded to a pious friar who had spent most of his previous life in the ordered calm of a convent.

Soon after Manrique's arrival at Dianga it was rumoured that the King at Mrauk-u, fearing another revolt on the part of his roving mercenaries, had decided upon a second dose of the medicine applied so drastically in 1607. The Portuguese fleet was away upon its annual slaving expedition. One of the captains, however, had been left behind because he was ill with fever. He was Gonsales Tibao, a relative of the late "King" of Sandwip. He and Manrique decided to make an immediate journey to Mrauk-u in order to persuade the King to stay his hand. The story of their journey is graphically told by the friar in his memoirs, which were composed years later, after his return home, and are now available in an English translation published by the Hakluyt Society. To say that the journey was adventurous is an understatement. It was almost a miracle that they ever got through at all. They found the King paying his annual state visit to the famous Mahamuni shrine, later removed to the Burmese capital by King Bodawpaya, when he conquered and annexed Arakan in 1784.

Manrique was able to persuade the King that he had nothing to fear from the Portuguese at Dianga, and the projected expedition against them was called off. He also obtained other concessions, particularly the royal sanction to build a Catholic church at the suburb of Daingri-pet, on the western side of the capital, where the Portuguese mercenaries in the Royal Guard lived. Although extremely outspoken on the subject of religion at royal audiences, the intrepid friar quite won the heart of the King and became a *persona grata* at Court. He was taken on a round of sightseeing at the palace, where he saw the loot taken from Burma in 1599. He was so impressed by his visit to the famous White Elephant, taken on that occasion, that he occupied three whole chapters of his book in describing its origin and history. He confessed himself "thunderstruck" at the brilliance and size of the jewels in the royal regalia. He also had an affecting conversation with the daughter of King Nandabayin of Burma, who had been carried away in the great

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Collis, op. cit. p. 89.

raid and had subsequently married King Razagri of Arakan. Her husband had died in 1612. At the time of Manrique's visit she was Grand Dowager of the Court. She told Manrique with deep emotion of all her misfortunes and sufferings.

After spending six months at the capital Manrique returned to his duties at Dianga. That was early in 1631. In the next year the Great Mughal, Shah Jehan, decided to wipe out the Portuguese settlement at Hugli. The slave raiding from Dianga had become intolerable, and although there was no proof that the Hugli Portuguese had given any active support to the raiders, they were suspected of being implicated in the business. Moreover, the population of the settlement was Catholic and Shah Jehan as a strict Moslem was anxious to read the hated Christians a severe lesson. He had been roused to fury, it was said, by an incident which occurred in 1629. The Dianga pirates had seized the wife of a high Mughal official at a village near Dacca and carried her off. A certain Portuguese captain, Diego de Sa, had fallen violently in love with the lady. She had resisted his advances and in self-defence had inflicted a grievous wound upon him. Manrique had arrived upon the scene just in time to save the poor woman from being thrown into the sea bound hand and foot. Subsequently he had converted her to the Catholic faith and she had married a young Portuguese of good birth. The outraged relatives of the lady had petitioned Shah Jehan to avenge their dishonour upon the Portuguese at Hugli.

The town put up a desperate resistance. But it was unfortified, and it soon became obvious that the Mughal army would take the place. The Portuguese therefore decided to cut their way out. After a tremendous fight a number of their ships managed to get away, and made their way to Saugar Island just outside the mouth of the River Hugli. There they built a settlement, sending a Jesuit, Father Cabral, to the King of Arakan with news of what had taken place and a request for help. Actually the King had already heard of the siege, and had deemed the opportunity ripe for a surprise attack upon the Mughal forces besieging Hugli. He feared that, if successful, their next objective would be Chittagong. His real plan was the ultimate conquest of Bengal from the Mughals. But such a task was much beyond his power unaided. With the Bengal fleet in his pocket, however, he hoped to achieve an alliance with Goa. Unfortunately he was cheated of his initial plan by the weather. The *feringhi* armada arrived to find that Hugli had fallen. They

followed up the Mughal fleet, however, and destroyed it. Then they fell back on Saugar to await reinforcements.

When Father Cabral arrived at Mrauk-u, King Thiri-Thudhamma confided the great scheme to him. Judged in the cold light of normal political calculation it was fantastic. But, as Mr. Collis points out<sup>1</sup> the White Elephant to a Buddhist was the symbol of universal dominion. As the Hsin-byu-shin (Lord of the White Elephant) might it not be his fate in some miraculous manner to translate the dream into reality? So it came about that Fra Manrique made a second visit to the golden city of Mrauk-u, this time as adviser to Gaspar de Mesquita, envoy extraordinary from the Viceroy of Goa to the King of Arakan. That was late in 1633.

The negotiations, as one might expect, came to nothing. The King was immensely disappointed. The envoy sailed away leaving Manrique to make his way back to Dianga. But the King objected to his departure. He liked the Friar, and unfortunately the latter now knew too many state secrets to be permitted to leave the kingdom. It was an embarrassing situation. So for the time being Manrique had to remain in Arakan. His book tells of further strange adventures, which, however, must be passed over in a brief survey such as the present one. He also witnessed the long-deferred coronation of King Thiri-thudhamma, of which he writes a picturesque account. Then at last he managed to persuade the King to let him go. And with that his romantic connexion with the Land of the Great Image ended.

The Portuguese were not the only Europeans with whom King Thiri-thudhamma cultivated friendly relations. Although they do not appear in Manrique's story, those bitter enemies alike of his faith and nation, the Dutch, were also established at Mrauk-u. In the early days of the century, when King Razagri was engaged in struggles against the freebooters of Dianga, he had sought the help of the Dutch. In return he offered them free trade and permission to build fortified trading stations in his dominions. That was how Peter Floris came to make his journey to Arakan in the days before he entered the service of the English East India Company and sailed with Lucas Antheunis upon its Seventh Voyage. The Dutch, however, were in 1608 unwilling to accept the Arakanese invitation. At the time they were probably too busy elsewhere to spare the fighting men and ships that the King required. In any case there

<sup>1</sup>Op. cit. pp. 189-190.

was a fundamental difference of outlook: the King wanted military help, the Dutch wanted trade. Dutch ships, however, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, did give timely assistance to Razagri's successor in 1615 against the egregious Tibao. Then it was that they became aware of the value of Arakan as a slave market. There was a constant demand for slaves in the Dutch settlements on the East Indian Archipelago, and their merchants soon became the King's chief customers for those unhappy human beings, whom they purchased from him at a few rupees a head. They also went to Arakan for rice. Their factories in the spice-growing districts were in such need of food supplies that their agents were inevitably drawn to the great rice-growing districts of Indo-China.

At first their trade with Arakan was intermittent; but late in 1624 the Daghregister of Batavia records that an expedition under Anthony Caen had been sent out in search of Portuguese vessels and with letters from the Governor-General authorizing the conclusion of a trading agreement with the King of Arakan for the import of rice and slaves. As a result a Resident was installed at Mrauk-u, and for a time settled trade developed. In 1631, however, this was brought to a standstill by the terrible famine of that period. The Resident reported that both people and cattle were dying of starvation, and men had actually eaten each other. He was withdrawn and the factory closed.

King Thiri-thudhamma was not at all satisfied with this turn of events. In 1633 he sent two ambassadors to Batavia to beg the Dutch to reopen their factory. They were then blockading the great Portuguese fortress of Malacca and in urgent need of supplies. Hence, two Dutch ships laden with copper, iron, steel, spices and coco-nuts escorted the Arakanese envoys home with instructions to buy rice, benzoin, shellac and about 300 slaves of both sexes between the ages of 10 and 25 years. A Resident was once more appointed and the King was delighted. He promised to build a stone building to serve as headquarters for the Company's merchants.

The fundamentally different outlook between the Dutch and the King, however, continued and was the cause of difficulties right from the outset. Here is an interesting example: it is a letter from King Thiri-thudhamma to the Dutch Governor-General at Batavia which arrived in March 1636. The King styles himself the invincible ruler of Arakan, Bengal and many other states, lord of the good sea-passage and of the red and white elephants. He addresses the

Governor-General as the "lord of great stone castles, of many factories and of Batavia, powerful, of good intelligence and brave." Then the letter goes on:

"I have lately learnt that your Excellency was in good health. Your Excellency's letter accompanied by his present stated that Your Excellency again wished to purchase all manner of rice and slaves. Since then such of Your Excellency's people as have come hither have had what they wanted. When Your Excellency hears their reports he will think we have not favoured them, but have raised difficulties. The fact is that Van der Stel, who came to our harbour here, brought with him on his ship the ambassadors whom the Mughals sent to Your Excellency. Will Your Excellency be pleased not to permit such a thing, for the Mughals are our enemies."

The Dutch, of course, as traders thought it nothing amiss to establish trading relations with both sides, and since the Mughal capture of Hugli in 1632 had been in eager competition with the English for a share in the trade of Bengal. But the King of Arakan could only think in terms of a semi-military alliance, and he knew that while it is possible to sit on a fence, it is impossible to be on both sides of it at once. Here the Dutch were up against a formidable difficulty; so formidable that ultimately it was the cause of their final withdrawal from Arakan in 1665.

There was another important difficulty in the early days. Between 1631 and 1634 there raged round the periphery of the Bay of Bengal one of the worst famines on record. Now the Dutch went to Arakan to buy rice, and to them business was business: it did not matter how many people starved so long as they could buy up their rice; and they could offer the brokers a much higher price than those current in the country. Thiri-thudhamma's ambassadors, however, had opened his eyes to the fact that Dutch operations against Malacca had greatly increased their needs of rice, and offered him a splendid opportunity for profit. Hence to the great annoyance of the Dutch he made rice a royal monopoly and appointed a royal broker through whom alone they could buy. Incidentally, by this means he was able to control the amount of rice that was exported from his country. The Dutch thought the monopoly extremely unfair, but in this respect there is no doubt that the King's commercial morality was no lower than theirs. And from prices quoted in the Daghregister it does not seem that they were

at all badly treated. In Batavia in 1633 rice was selling at 18 tangas<sup>1</sup> the carra of 440 lbs.<sup>2</sup> The King of Arakan charged them 10 tangas the carra. Later on, when the shortage was over, they managed to get the price reduced to 5 tangas. What particularly annoyed them was that on various pretexts the King managed to send people to Batavia who kept him informed of conditions and prices there. The Dutch tried to evade the royal monopoly by sending agents to Chittagong, where rice was cheaper. But the King defeated them by buying all the rice there and selling it at a controlled price.

The first Dutch chief, Adam van der Mandere, never got on well with King Thiri-thudhamma after their struggle over the rice question. In 1638 both were removed from the scene, the King by assassination, the chief by transfer to another station. Two kings came to the throne of Arakan in that year: the first only lasted a few months. With the second, Narapatigyi, the new Dutch chief, Arent Jansen van den Helm, got on reasonably well. But Narapatigyi's health broke down in 1643, and for two years until his death in 1645 he was a helpless invalid, unable to attend to business. During this period an incident occurred, which so outraged the Dutch that they closed down the factory and recalled all their merchants. A frigate belonging to a Dutch free burgher, Nicholas der Graeff, bound for Chittagong with a valuable cargo of piece-goods on board, was decoyed into Mrauk-u harbour and seized with all on board. The cargo was confiscated and the captain and crew imprisoned. All the efforts of the Dutch factors on the spot, backed up by thunders and threats from Batavia, failed to secure their release. Van der Graeff and his chief officer died in prison. The King was too ill to deal with the matter, and although he was most anxious that the Dutch factory should not be closed he was overruled by his ministers, who, presumably, had had a large share of the pickings. So for eight years the factory was empty and Dutch ships took heavy reprisals on Arakanese shipping.

In 1652 Sandathudhamma ascended the throne. He has left a great name as one of the best of the Arakanese monarchs. From the outset of his reign it was evident that a new era had dawned, and the Dutch began to consider reopening their factory. Hence, early

<sup>1</sup>Tanga—the official Mughal currency before the rupee. It was worth about two shillings in the English currency of the time. The word is still the one used in Arakan and Burma for the rupee, though now pronounced "dinga".

<sup>2</sup>Dutch lbs. (1 lb. Dutch = 1.09 lbs. avoirdupois).

in 1653 a new Dutch chief, Joan Goessens, appeared at the capital to negotiate the resumption of trade. He brought with him a list of trading terms, which provide an illuminating commentary upon previous Dutch experience in the country. The first article laid down that bygones should be bygones. The second stipulated that the six survivors of van der Graeff's ill-fated crew were to be released in exchange for 123 Arakanese, who had been captured by the Dutch in reprisals after the closing of the factory in 1645. The rest of the articles dealt more specifically with commercial questions. Dutch ships coming to the "Arakan river" were to be supplied with competent pilots to bring them up to the capital. Letters arriving from the Governor-General to the King were not to be subjected to long delays before delivery. Dutch captains were to be granted free access to the King, so that they might make their representations to him directly, and not be forced to write them down for his ministers to play about with. They were also to bring with them their own interpreter. The official interpreter, supplied by the Court, invariably edited, softened down or eliminated parts of what they said, so as to keep anything disagreeable from the royal ears. There must be free trade under royal licence in all kinds of merchandise, and the Dutch factory must not be inconvenienced with spies and sentries. Both imports and exports must be duty free. The Dutch must not be compelled to exchange the slaves they had purchased for others of less value palmed off upon them by the King. Money must be exchanged at fair rates. A suitable site must be provided for a factory.

The Batavia Council felt that in the past due dignity had not been preserved by their factors in approaching the King. Hence one article runs: "That when we appear before His Majesty, we may do so with fitting tokens of respect according to our wont, without being dragged before His Majesty's throne by a Coutewaal or any other minister, so as to be forced to make there such strange compliments, as are now usual, just to please them and to be the laughing-stock of everyone present."

Another interesting request is for the extradition to Batavia of all children born to the Dutch of Arakanese mothers. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries a similar demand constantly recurs in the negotiations between Europeans and rulers of Burma or Arakan. In those days foreign traders visiting those lands were encouraged to form alliances with the women of the country on the understand-

ing that when they left, they might not take with them either wives or children. The prohibition often constituted a serious hardship, since the Arakanese or Burmese woman has always had a very high position, quite different from the rule in India; she is an excellent wife and possesses great personal charm. Europeans resorted to various devices to smuggle their wives and families out of the country. Bribery was often effective; but there were even cases of wives being spirited away in the huge Martaban jars then in use on ships for storage of water and grain. The Dutch had first made this demand for their children in 1636. It had been reported at Batavia that these children were being brought up as Moslems, and the strict Dutch Calvinists were horrified. But both Thiri-thudhamma and Narapatigyi had flatly refused to break what was an old-established rule. On this occasion, however, Sandathudhamma granted the request. The Daghregister gives the list of children deported under this agreement. There were only five of them: two boys and three girls. And two of the latter were said to be the daughters of one styled "Jan the Englishman". Evidently, as previous kings had argued would happen, the mothers of the other children objected to losing them.

Sandathudhamma not only granted all the Dutch demands, but went out of his way to assure them that the evil days of his predecessors were over. His subjects spoke to Joan Goessens about him with evident enthusiasm. He gave the Dutch merchants a magnificent reception, and they wrote to Batavia about the splendour of his court in terms reminiscent of those used by Fra Mauro. This is how the Daghregister describes their first visit to the palace:

"Arriving in front of the palace they dismounted from their elephants, and after sitting on a sort of verandah for a good three hours awaiting the King's arrival, they were at last summoned in before His Majesty's throne. They had first to pass through three gates, each with a large esplanade or forecourt between them. There they could see armed cavalry and foot soldiers by the dozen, with a large number of elephants drawn up in good order and in battle array. The elephants, which stood apart in the third court, were very costly caparisoned with gold and embroidered cloths, their tusks set with gold rings and some entirely covered with gold. Above all, the nearer they (the Dutch envoys) came to the throne the more splendid was the sight, so that the envoys believed that the King had gathered there all his might and glory. The

throne itself was gilded all over and presented a magnificent spectacle; and the number of men sitting round it appeared to be not less than those seen outside in the forecourts. Here a place was appointed for the envoy and his suite among the magnates seated below in the chamber; and after he had remained some time like them kneeling down and clasping his hands in front of his head, the Governor-General's letter was taken from his hands and handed over with fitting obeisance to a minister, who in the presence of the King and all the people read it aloud, first in Portuguese and then in the Arakanese language."

The Dutch records contain few passages like the above. Unlike Manrique, the Dutch merchants looked at everything from a business angle. Nothing else interested them at all, if we may judge by their correspondence, though perhaps it is a little unfair to expect anything else from such a source. On commercial matters their letters are full of first-rate information. From Batavia their ships took to Arakan spices of all sorts and Japanese iron, from the Coromandel Coast Indian piece-goods. But the demand for all these goods was usually inadequate for the purchase of the necessary return cargoes. Hence each ship going to Arakan was supplied with a large amount of coined silver. This was usually in dollars of different denominations, which both the Dutch and the English companies coined for use in the East in those days. The coin most in use was the "real of eight", worth about four shillings and sixpence in the English currency of the time.

The cargoes carried away consisted mainly of rice and slaves. One ship had 210 slaves, another 325, another 145. The number varied considerably, and no average can be struck of the actual numbers exported to Batavia. In a good year at least four ships sailed for Batavia; hence the number of slaves carried may have been not far short of a thousand. The prices paid also varied considerably. Sometimes the price per head was as low as ten florins.<sup>1</sup> The highest price recorded was thirty florins. In 1641 the Arakan government imposed a poll tax of 10 tangas for each slave exported. The Dutch protested vigorously, but apparently without avail. After the reopening of the factory in 1653, however, no further mention is made of this duty. They were not permitted to export skilled slaves. All the best ones, and especially craftsmen, were retained by the King.

<sup>1</sup>The Dutch florin was then worth about one shilling and eight pence.

Other articles of export mentioned were indigo, shellac, elephants and dungerries, a cheap coarse cloth made in Tippera. Elephants were very profitable. They were purchased in Arakan for between 1,300 and 1,400 tangas each and sold on the Coromandel Coast for four times that amount. Cowrie shells were in use in Arakan as coinage in those days and Dutch ships would often put in to the Maldives to collect them. They were sold by weight, at the rate of 48 viss<sup>1</sup> for a rupee. The Dutch also included them in royal presents. Occasionally we hear of them importing tobacco into Arakan. The King always made a practice of buying up a large supply which he retailed to his people, and until he had got rid of this, no one else might sell the article. Narapatigyi had a taste for liquor, and on one occasion, we are told, when a vat of sweet wine and a case of Hollands were presented to him by the Dutch, he laughed heartily "as a token that he was not displeased".

One of the Dutch chiefs in the reign of Sandathudhamma died at Mrauk-u. He was apparently a great favourite with the King, who wrote to Batavia a moving and obviously deeply sincere letter. One passage in it runs: "I have always received him with good affection, being aware of the zeal that was in him; and he reported to me all the orders that he received, wherefore he earned much honour and favour in my kingdom, which he enjoyed until his death. I have had him buried and accompanied to the grave by my noblemen, for he was worthy of such honour. It has pleased God to take away a man who was so great that I and all the ministers of my Council are afflicted with sorrow."

The Dutch factory at Mrauk-u was finally withdrawn in the year 1665. A series of dramatic events, which culminated in the destruction of the Portuguese at Dianga by the Mughals in 1666, was the cause of this move. The story must be briefly told. It begins with the well-known incident in Indian history when Shah Shujah, the third son of the Mughal Emperor, Shah Jehan, fled from Bengal via Chittagong to Mrauk-u in 1660, and died there shortly afterwards. There was a mystery about his death which attracted the attention of many writers of that time. Schouten, Bernier, Manuczi, Bowrey and Hamilton all wrote accounts of it, and there are several different versions of the story. Probably the safest evidence comes from the letters written by the Dutchmen who were actually in

<sup>1</sup>The viss is roughly 3½ lbs.

Arakan at the time. It is upon these therefore that the story given here is based.

Shah Shujah had been appointed Viceroy of Bengal by his father. When the Emperor became seriously ill in 1657, there was a scramble for power among his sons. It was won by Aurungzeb, who dethroned his father, imprisoned his brother Murad, and made himself Emperor in 1658. Then he attacked Shujah in Bengal. Early in 1660 this prince was fleeing towards Dacca before the victorious march of the imperial commander, Mir Jumla. Unable to maintain himself at Dacca, Shujah took ship for Arakan. He was met by the Arakan fleet and conveyed to Dianga, whence a few weeks later he proceeded on to the capital. There, according to the Dutch, he and his suite were lodged in a bamboo house outside the city, and no foreigner was allowed near them. The *feringhis* were said to have stolen not less than twenty-three tons of the treasure he brought with him. The King, expecting trouble with Aurungzeb, posted his fleet off Dianga to prevent an attack and sent up reinforcements.

A few months later, in December 1660, more news filtered through to the Dutch. A party of seventy or eighty Moslems had arrived from India to join Shah Shujah, had run amok, killed some Arakanese and had nearly succeeded in firing the palace. They had been rounded up and killed almost to man. The King was said to have been in two minds about visiting Shah Shujah with the same treatment, but had been dissuaded therefrom by his mother and some of the nobles, who had argued that killing princes was a dangerous sport, especially if his own subjects acquired a taste for it.

On 7th February, 1661, there was another massacre, but as the most elaborate precautions were taken to keep all foreigners away from the scene of operations, the roads being patrolled by troops and the waterways by galleasses, the Dutch at the factory could not at first get reliable reports of what had happened. The first story they pieced together from the spate of rumours was that Shah Shujah's retinue had been massacred because he had plotted to escape from custody and seize the throne of Arakan. Shah Shujah himself with his three sons, his harem and about 300 followers had fled at night pursued by an Arakanese force, which had taken two of his sons. He, however, and the remaining son had escaped to Tippera. Later it appeared that he had not got away; it was thought that he had been stoned to death by his pursuers.

What exactly had taken place the Dutch never learned. The general belief in the capital was that he had been killed in the first attack upon his house, but that the Arakanese officers had made his body unrecognizable in order to loot the rich jewels which he habitually wore. His wives and children were taken alive, the ladies being lodged in the palace, the sons thrown into prison. The booty taken was said to be immense. The task of transporting it all to the Royal Treasury occupied quite a number of days.

It was through the Dutch, who transmitted the news to their factory at Dacca, that the new Viceroy of Bengal heard of the murder. He at once commandeered a Dutch ship to sail to Mrauk-u with an envoy on board bearing a peremptory demand for the surrender of the children of the dead prince, and the sum of twelve thousand rupees for bribing the Arakanese ministers. The Dutch were now in a most uncomfortable position; they felt sure that the King of Arakan would be much offended at the use of one of their ships in this manner. He was indeed so, but the situation was even worse than the Dutch suspected, since it transpired that the Viceroy's letter to the King stated that he had their support in the matter. The King was so angry that he wrote a very strong protest to the Governor-General at Batavia. He also refused the Viceroy's request. This, however, was renewed again and again until relations became very strained. Meanwhile both sides played hard for Dutch support, with the latter stubbornly clinging to a policy of neutrality which pleased neither the Viceroy nor the King.

In July 1663 a desperate attempt to rescue the princes was made by some of their adherents, who actually succeeded in setting fire to a part of the palace. By way of reprisal the King had the three young men beheaded; a large number of Moslems and Bengalis at the capital were also butchered. He even went so far as to imprison a Mughal ambassador. The King had now burnt his boats. War seemed inevitable. Early in 1664 a great Arakanese flotilla raided Bengal. About seventy galleasses from Dianga, manned by the notorious *feringhi*, sailed up the river towards Dacca, put to flight a Mughal flotilla of 260 vessels, destroying more than half of them, and carried away hundreds of people from the countryside into slavery. In the past this sort of thing had gone on year after year almost with impunity. But now a new man had come upon the scene. Aurungzeb had appointed his maternal uncle, Shayista

Khan, to be Viceroy of Bengal, and it had been decided that the pirate nest at Dianga must be finally burnt out.

Shayista Khan turned at once to the Dutch. He wanted their help. He began by wooing them; but they were too wary. So he sent an envoy direct to Batavia to ask if they would be prepared to help him and what would be the nature of their assistance. To their Bengal factors he said bluntly that if they refused to help him, and did not clear out of Arakan, lock, stock and barrel, he would expel them from his dominions. The King of Arakan also was equally insistent that they must help him. He was planning another great raid on Bengal, and intended to impress every Dutch ship he could lay hands on for service with his fleet. Luckily for the harrassed Dutch a storm shattered his fleet before it could sail, and in the interval while it was refitting he allowed the Dutch ships to return to Batavia. When it did sail to the tune of 400 ships it carried out an even more devastating raid than the previous one.

These new developments caused the Batavia Council grave concern. A special meeting was held in July 1665 to review the whole situation. Their Bengal trade was going rapidly ahead. They had prosperous factories at Chinsura, Kasimbazar and Patna, besides lesser stations, including those at Hugli and Dacca. Moreover, they had greater security there than in Arakan. There could be only one result to their deliberations: they must immediately withdraw from Arakan. They hoped that that would be sufficient, without having to go the length of giving active assistance to Shayista Khan. Hence they decided to appeal to the Great Mughal himself through the Director of their Surat factory. He was instructed very tactfully to inform the ministers of the Imperial Court that it was contrary to the general rule of the Company to give such assistance, since their policy was to maintain neutrality in all quarrels between Indian rulers. Secret instructions were sent to Daniel Six, the head of their Arakan factory, to evacuate at once; a secret letter also went to Shayista Khan apprising him of the plan.

Everything possible was done to hoodwink the Arakan Court. A public letter, concocted specially for Court consumption, asked for further cargoes of rice and slaves, and an extra ship was said to be coming for this purpose. Six's private instructions, however, informed him that the story of this extra ship was a myth, and was put in "to mislead the world, since the safety of the Company's servants and property depends upon keeping this matter secret."

The ruse was successful, though barely so, since the arrival of more Dutch ships than usual made the Court smell a rat. And a rumour actually got abroad that they intended to flit. It was apparently well known to the Court that an ambassador from Shayista Khan had been to Batavia. Only the clever lying of their interpreter enabled the Dutch to allay the suspicions of the ministers sufficiently for them to make a successful getaway.

One night in November they hurriedly transported everything they could on to four ships, that came in close to the factory under cover of darkness. Then with a favourable wind they began to make their way down stream. In the morning the King realized that he had been outwitted. The Dutch had left behind a message explaining why they were evacuating, and assuring him that they had no intention of helping Shayista Khan. Before they were out of the river a special messenger came to them from the King bearing a letter for delivery to the Governor-General. It was very restrained in its reproaches. It asked why the Dutch should be so much afraid of the Viceroy of Bengal? His predecessors in office had for generations made similar threats that they would conquer Arakan, but all their attempts had failed. So would this one. "How much easier would it be for him to build the Tower of Babel than conquer my kingdom," wrote the king.

Events, however, were shortly to prove that the Dutch estimate of the situation was nearer the truth than the King's. The Bengal navy had been practically destroyed by the Arakanese raids. But Shayista Khan was busily engaged in building and equipping a huge new fleet. Before the Dutch had evacuated Mrauk-u it was ready for action, and had swooped down upon Sandwip Island in order to use it as a base for the great enterprise against Dianga. But the Portuguese there were formidable fighters, and in seamanship were far superior to the Bengal Moslems. Fortune, however, favoured him. A quarrel developed between the *feringhis* and the Arakanese. Shayista Khan therefore offered them good terms to enter the imperial service. The great majority of them left Dianga and went over to the Mughal side. Then in 1666 the pirate nest was assailed by land and sea. In February after a fierce fight the Arakanese navy was worsted, and two days later the Citadel of Chittagong surrendered. The power of the *feringhi* pirates was for ever destroyed, and the whole Chittagong district down to the Naaf River was incorporated in the Mughal Empire.

## Chapter VII

### MADRAS ORGANIZES THE PRIVATE TRADE.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DUTCH IN BURMA PROVED THAT TRADE WITH that country on an officially organized scale was not a paying proposition under the conditions obtaining there in the 17th century. The capital was too far away from the ports—it usually took not less than two months to make the journey up-stream from Syriam to Ava. Customs duties on imports of piece-goods worked out at  $16\frac{1}{2}\%$ , an absurdly high level. The export of the goods, most in demand elsewhere, such as first water rubies, ganza and saltpetre, was forbidden. Most other Burma products were royal monopolies subject to vagaries of the royal caprice or the gambling instincts of ministers. The necessity to sell through brokers caused bad debts to accumulate uncontrollably. The sailing seasons imposed by the monsoons meant that ships could not be economically employed owing to the exceptionally long periods during which they had to be laid up in port. Moreover, the policy of using the Irrawaddy as the backdoor into China—a first-rate commercial idea—was completely thwarted by Burmese opposition.

The Dutch, who had a very strong sense of commercial reality, never again attempted to reopen trade with independent Burma. Their withdrawal, however, caused the English once more to direct attention to the country. The *Compagnie Royale des Indes Orientales* opened a factory at Ayuthia in 1680 and Louis XIV embarked upon an ambitious scheme to secure political control over Siam. The representatives of the English company there, faced by the hostility of the great minister, Constant Phaulkon, and of his associate, "Siamese White",<sup>1</sup> began to find their position in Siam untenable, and a situation developed which favoured the reconsideration of the vexed question of trade with Burma. Sir Streynsham Master at Fort St. George<sup>2</sup> was interested in the question of the better arming of the English factories lying within range of Sivaji's raiding activities. He looked to Burma as a possible source of saltpetre and ganza (for cannon balls!). Burmese lac, which the Dutch had manufactured into high-grade wax, was still

<sup>1</sup>See Maurice Collis's novel of that name.

the best in the world, and there was great demand for it in Europe in those days of the universal use of sealing-wax. The Directors at home wrote out to their servants at Madras that they could do with at least a hundred tons annually of what they listed as "best Pegu Sticklack, black."

Streynsham Master and the Madras Council therefore drafted a set of eighteen articles of trade, which were entrusted to a certain Portuguese inhabitant of Madras, Joao Pereira de Faria, who undertook to negotiate with the court of Ava for the resumption of English trade. These stipulated that imports by English merchants into Burma should pay only 5 per cent customs duties, exports from the country should be duty-free, that the English should be permitted to export saltpetre, indigo and lac from the country, that English ships wrecked off the coast of Burma should not be confiscated or their crews enslaved, and that a Chief of the English should be appointed to control all their nationals in the country. Syriam, Pegu and Ava were mentioned as the places at which factories were to be reopened, if the scheme were agreed to by the Burmese. The reply of the Court of Ava was typical of the attitude it maintained towards foreigners at this period, and for long after. It refused to bind itself to any written assurances. Let the Company send its own representatives to appear with presents before the Golden Feet, and due "favour and pity" would be shown.

When the Directors at home heard of this new move they flatly refused to permit the reopening of official trade. They thought it should be easily possible to obtain adequate supplies of Burma products through the Indian merchants who frequented that land. But for a time their resolution was somewhat shaken by the appearance in London of a Dutchman named Spar, who had been for many years head of the Dutch factory in Burma, and asserted that he had made forty tons of gold in profits there for his masters. He worked upon the mind of Charles II's brother, James, Duke of York, who insisted that the Directors should give the Dutchman an interview. They thought him "a knowing, experienced but an ill-natured boisterous, prating fellow", and were very chary of his "hyperbolical commendacions" of trade with Burma. He told them that Burma was the next best place to Java from which to command the trade to China. They replied that the King of Burma was a great and proud prince who would not permit any trade worthy of their consideration. But they told the Madras people

that they might enquire further into the matter. Hence the negotiations with Ava continued for a time, until in 1685 the Directors once more made up their minds that "that useless factory" should not be reopened.

In the meantime a considerable private trade had been growing up between Madras and Syriam. The Company gave its blessing to such operations. Private traders, the Directors intimated, might be permitted to burn their fingers, if they liked. Had their trade developed sufficiently for the Company to step in and take it over officially, undoubtedly it would have done so. But such a situation never arose. By judicious encouragement the Fort St. George authorities did indeed attract so much of this trade to Madras, that by the end of the century it was recognized as the chief Indian centre for Burma commodities. Even then the Directors deemed the trade too uncertain for the Company to embark upon it officially, though possibly the fact that the Company's servants themselves at Madras were deeply involved on their own account was not without its influence.

It was in this connexion that the mission of Edward Fleetwood and James Leslie, so fully reported in Dalrymple's *Oriental Repertory*, was sent to Ava in 1695. They were private merchants sent to recover goods belonging to Nathaniel Higginson, the Governor of Fort St. George, which had been seized, together with a Madras Armenian and his ship, by the Burmese authorities at Martaban. By this time a new factor had begun to operate. It had long been known that Burma teak was invaluable for ship-building. The Portuguese are said to have cultivated good relations with Pegu in the 16th century partly in order to prevent supplies of teak from finding their way into Turkish hands. The Burmese, of course, built their many river craft of this material, and Samuel Purchas in his 1626 volume mentions their shipbuilding industry. But very little European shipbuilding had so far been carried out in Burmese ports, although Madras in the latter part of the century eagerly bought up supplies of "Pegu plank". The great increase in the size of the Company's fleets and the development of France as a hostile naval power made the question of repair shops in Indian ports a pressing one. Vizagapatam was one such centre. In 1689, however, the Fort St. George authorities suddenly decided to send the frigate *Diamond* to Syriam for repairs instead of Vizagapatam. The idea may have come from the French, who had begun to operate

in Burmese ports in the previous year. It is impossible to say for certain. But certain it is that from this time onwards Burma came to have a new importance in English eyes. Notwithstanding the downfall of Constant Phaulkon in Siam in 1668 the French had not given up hope of dominating Siam. In 1690 a squadron of their ships bound for Siam sailed first up the Coromandel Coast, inflicting some damage upon Dutch and English shipping and making an abortive attempt on Fort St. George. Then it rather significantly sailed across to the Burma coast to refit and take on provisions.

Fleetwood and Leslie therefore were not only sent over to secure the release of an Armenian and his ship, but were explicitly instructed to ask for "free liberty of repairing and building of ships" at Syriam. In addition, they were furnished with a much whittled-down edition of Sir Streynsham Master's Articles of Trade as a basis for negotiations. The Burmese government evidently welcomed this as a heaven-sent opportunity to force the Company to resume official relations. The envoys were told quite clearly that if the Company would take over the factory at Syriam officially, all Higginson's requests would be granted. In addition, the Burmese would afford every assistance to the Company to enable it to build a dock at Syriam for the repair of ships, but the Company must appoint a resident there to assume charge of its operations. They "insisted mightily" upon this, wrote Fleetwood in his journal. They were extremely cordial, and gave permission for the construction of two new ships at Syriam subject to compliance with their conditions.

Higginson was, of course, powerless to comply fully. But the Burmese request was a reasonable one. It was to the advantage of neither side that private traders, admitted under an official agreement, should have no organization and no responsible person in charge, with whom the Burmese authorities could deal. Burmese officials had their own standards of conduct; but then, so had European traders. Under the circumstances a method of procedure was hit upon which satisfied the Burmese and remained in operation for nearly half a century. A Chief of the Affairs of the English Nation was appointed to take charge of the English factory and dockyard at Syriam. The first holder of this formidable title was one Thomas Bowyear, a "freeman inhabitant" of Madras. He was empowered to reside in the Company's house at Syriam, and all Englishmen trading to Burma were required "to pay due respect

and obedience" to him. He was to arrange for shipbuilding there, and in his instructions 'brigantines of forty or fifty tons were specially mentioned as being useful to the Right Honourable Company.

At first very little resulted from these arrangements. Higginson's original idea was to form a small private syndicate to carry them out, but subscribers were in no haste to support so risky a venture. Normally the Chief did not reside at Syriam all the year round. His "permanent address", so to speak, was at Madras. When the sailing season began in September he would accompany the Madras merchants to Syriam and make it his headquarters until April or May of the next year, when he would return home. Alexander Hamilton, who visited Syriam in 1709, tells us that the private trade there on the part of Englishmen had almost ceased, and the English confined themselves entirely to the business of building and repairing ships. On the other hand we know that Gulston Addison, brother of Mr. Spectator, who became Governor of Madras in 1709 over the heads of six of his superiors, and then died almost immediately after his appointment, was the manager of a private syndicate, known as the Pegu Joint Stock, which employed its own ship, the *Gulston Galley*, on voyages to Syriam, and had English agents there. Incidentally, Joseph was residuary legatee of his brother's estate and expected to realize a very substantial sum. But the Pegu Joint Stock had failed badly, and involved the estate in such heavy loss that Joseph's hopes were completely dashed, to his no small chagrin.

An amusing incident, which occurred at this time, shows how wise the Burmese were to insist upon the proper supervision of the trade carried on under the protection of the Company's flag. An Indian accounts clerk, who went to Burma on one of the Madras ships, forged a letter to the King as from the Governor of Madras, and sent it with a present to Ava. The Burmese government fell neatly into the trap and sent him in return a present of elephants far exceeding his present in value. The trick, however, was discovered by the English authorities and Governor Thomas Pitt clapped him in gaol "to prevent the pernicious consequences that attend such vile practices". Then it was unfortunately discovered that he had been doing business in Burma on commission for several Madras merchants. Hence it was decided to let him off with a

heavy fine and an undertaking never again to go to Burma.

One of the best known Chiefs of the Affairs of the English Nation was George Heron, once a Hugli pilot in the days of Job Charnock, who had settled at Madras in 1689 and died there at the age of 80 in 1727. He had left England in 1668 and never returned. A daughter of his married into the Powney family at Madras and died a centenarian in 1780. He was a remarkable character, who was quite a power in the land at Syriam and understood perfectly how to manage the Burmese. In 1720, however, his connexion with a very unpleasant incident there brought down upon his head so severe a reprimand from the Directors in London that he apparently retired from business in Burma. It arose out of a private ship, the *Lusitania*, owned by Alexander Orme, father of the historian, in partnership with Francis Hugonin, chief gunner at Fort St. George, putting into Syriam for repairs. Her supercargoes flouted Heron's authority and proceeded to negotiate independently with the Burmese authorities at Prome, the teakwood centre up the Irrawaddy, for supplies of wood. Heron replied by instigating their labourers to strike for higher wages and by attempting to cause difficulties for them with the Governor of Syriam. At the Moharram Festival there was trouble between the lascars of the *Lusitania* and those of Captain Heron and an Armenian associate of his named Zechary. Obviously it was part of a plan on the part of these two to make the place too hot for the *Lusitania* people. Unfortunately bloodshed resulted. Somehow or other the English officers of the *Lusitania* got mixed up in an affray started by Zechary's men, who beat to death the ship's chief mate, Charles Wankford, and her gunner, John Dalziel. When the matter was inquired into by the Yondaw<sup>1</sup> at Syriam, Heron took Zechary's part and managed to obtain very light sentences for the murderers. Orme therefore complained of Heron's conduct to the Fort St. George Council, which instituted an enquiry, and the affair was reported home to the Directors.

After this incident a change was made in the method of managing English affairs at Syriam. A permanent Resident, with that title, was appointed in place of the Chief. His sole function was to take charge of shipbuilding on behalf of the Company. He was a private contractor, who on appointment to his post had to pay down as security to the Fort St. George Council a sum equal to

<sup>1</sup>The court of the Royal Governor.

£800. He received no salary, but was remunerated by the profits he made out of the Company's orders. The French employed a similar method there at the same time. The experiment was not a success. Some of the Residents were unsatisfactory: one actually absconded. Although Fort St. George sent most detailed instructions regarding the ships to be constructed, things were constantly going wrong through bad workmanship, and the cost was found to be excessive. Hence by 1741 it was decided to cease shipbuilding there. The Fort St. George Council wrote home: "We have in some former letter told your Honours what wretched fellows we are obliged to employ there, for which reason and several others we have resolved for the future when we want any more vessels to desire they may be built at Bombay."

Meanwhile in 1740 the Mons of Lower Burma had raised a great revolt against Ava and set up their own king at Pegu. Burmese resistance had collapsed and the rebels held all the country as far north as Prome and Toungoo. The new ruler was most anxious to cultivate good relations with Jonathan Smart, the English resident at Syriam, who, to the consternation of his employers at Madras, was reported to have sided with the Mons against the Burmese. He managed, however, to clear his character with the Madras Council, and was instructed to try his luck with attempting to gain the Pegu government's permission to export saltpetre. Although it had been decided not to build any more ships at Syriam, Smart, who was an enthusiast for the Burma trade, had managed to persuade Fort St. George that the change in government offered great commercial advantages to the English. Hence he was not only confirmed in his appointment as Resident in 1742 but was given a small force of sepoys with which to garrison the English factory.

In the following year, however, the whole situation changed in a sudden and dramatic way. The Burmese raided right into the heart of the Mon country and seized Syriam, which they submitted to a terrible three-days' sack. They burnt the Portuguese, Armenian and French churches there and destroyed all the warehouses of foreign merchants except the English factory. Probably its small garrison saved it. Then they got gloriously drunk and a Mon counter-attack recaptured the city. The Mons at once disarmed Smart's soldiery, looted the English factory, and burnt it to the

ground. Jonathan Smart and his small company were allowed to depart for Madras without further molestation. Thus ended the second English attempt to carry on organized trade with Burma. Their third attempt was doomed to have an even more disastrous ending.

## *Chapter VIII*

### THE FIRST PERIOD OF ANGLO-FRENCH RIVALRY

WE NOW ENTER UPON AN ENTIRELY NEW PERIOD ALIKE IN THE HISTORY of Burma and in that of the East India Company. Trading interests sink into the background. Political and strategic considerations being to dominate English relations with Burma. In 1740, as we have seen, the Mon peoples of Lower Burma threw off their allegiance to Ava and set up a king of their own at Pegu. Ever since the Toungoo dynasty had removed its capital up country to Ava its outlook had become more and more narrowly Burmese. The Mon peoples of the south were treated as if they were a subordinate race. The Burmese called them "Talaings", a term with a derogatory significance which had to be officially banned by the British Government some years ago. For some years the new state managed to maintain its independence, and the last king of the Toungoo dynasty showed himself utterly powerless to deal with the situation. Then in 1752 a champion of Burmese nationalism, Alaungpaya, arose at Shwebo in the north. He united his people in a great assault upon the south and ultimately succeeded in blotting out the Mon power.

While this struggle was in progress, an even bigger one was beginning between the French and the English in India. The War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) brought the first real clash between their two trading companies in the regions around the Bay of Bengal, a clash which was ultimately to transform the English one into a great political and territorial power. The Alaungpaya dynasty transformed Burma into a militarist power bent on pursuing a dangerous policy of expansion. The defeat of the French by Clive brought Bengal into English hands, and with an expansionist Burma soon beginning to threaten its eastern frontiers, a struggle between the two powers was in the very nature of things. Before that time arrived, however, the Anglo-French struggle had to be fought out, and during the process Burma itself came within the sphere of operations.

"In the year 1753," writes Dalrymple,<sup>1</sup> "an expedition to settle at Negrais was undertaken; as the particular motives for this scheme were communicated only to a secret committee, of these, or of the plan laid down, if there was any, I can therefore say nothing." He does, however, offer one useful clue to the mystery. It is a paper of anonymous authorship entitled "The Consequences of Settling a European Colony on the Island Negrais," which was furnished to him, he says, by "my deceased friend Governor Saunders". In it the advantages of holding a base in Burma for shipbuilding far away from the savage struggle between Burmese and Mons are adumbrated. But there is one brief and pregnant sentence, which shows what really was at the back of the writer's mind: "In case of a war with any European nation, of what consequence would it be, to have a safe and capacious harbour for ships at such a small distance from Madras and Bengal." In 1750, when those words were written, they could only have referred to one nation—France. The development of French naval power at Mauritius during the War of the Austrian Succession, under the brilliant direction of Labourdonnais, had given the English a sharp shock. In 1746 Madras had been taken by the French. When the war ended in 1748, Fort St. George was restored to the Company, but Governor Saunders found himself uncomfortably on the defensive against the resourceful energy of Dupleix, who threatened to encircle Madras with a ring of territory under French control, and was ever looking round for new vantage points.

How much the French actually used Burmese ports for shipbuilding before the days of Dupleix it is difficult to estimate. Their activities were intermittent. They had carried away timber and crude oil for shipbuilding activities elsewhere, and they had done a certain amount of repair work there. Dupleix pretty soon jumped to the fact that ports in Burma might be of immense advantage to a sea power. There is an interesting report written by him for the directors of the *Compagnie Royale* entitled *Mémoire sur la situation de nos établissements en 1727*. In it he urges the planting of a dockyard at Syriam. "Les bois y sont pour rien; les ouvriers seuls causent toute la dépense," he wrote. His suggestion was adopted, and in 1729 permission was obtained from the King of Burma for the work to begin.

The French dockyard at Syriam, like the English, was presided

<sup>1</sup>*Oriental Repertory*, I, 97.

over by a professional shipwright who was a private contractor working on a commission basis. Their first Chief, La Noë, built four ships for Pondicherry. Two of them, the *Fulvy* and the *Fleury*, were described as large ships. The other two, the *Marie Gertrude* and the *Diana*, belonged to the brigantine class. The *Fulvy* later on distinguished herself in operations against the English. In 1737 La Noë was succeeded by Puel, a sea-captain with a name in eastern waters, who planned considerable extensions to the French ship-building yard, but was prevented from carrying them out by the Mon rebellion of 1740. He returned to Pondicherry in 1742, but entrusted French interests to a Catholic priest at Syriam, Père Wittony. //

When the War of the Austrian Succession ended Dupleix became all the more anxious to strengthen the French position in Lower Burma, and the fact that the English had left the country severely alone after the destruction of their factory in 1743 caused him to realize what a wonderful opportunity lay open to him.) The situation there provided him with exactly the sort of conditions he was already beginning to exploit in the Carnatic and elsewhere: a struggle between two princes for a throne. It was his policy always to support the weaker claimant, since that ensured French predominance when their candidate had defeated his opponent. In Burma by 1759 the Mons were the weaker power, and their king, Binnya Dala, was anxiously looking round for help against the Burmese. In that year a Mon embassy appeared before Dupleix at Pondicherry. Dupleix promised them men and munitions, but before deciding how far to commit himself he sent over his agent, the Sieur de Bruno, to Pegu to spy out the land. Bruno was well received by Binnya Dala, and after solemnly pledging his master to the Mon cause, returned to Pondicherry to inform Dupleix that with five or six hundred well equipped French troops it would be a simple matter to gain control over Syriam. Dupleix began to dream of building a new French empire on the banks of the Irrawaddy, and wrote home to the Directors of the *Compagnie Royale* strongly pressing the venture.

\* In due course the English private merchants and sea captains, who still frequented Syriam, reported to Thomas Saunders at Madras what had taken place. One of them, Captain Thomas Taylor, probably the author of the paper on Negrais which later came into Dalrymple's hands, was convinced that Bruno and

Dupleix were also attempting to obtain from the Court of Pegu the cession of the island of Negrais just south of the entrance to the Bassein River.<sup>1</sup> For many years the English had hankered after the island as a naval station. As early as the year 1686 Fort St. George had made an abortive attempt to seize it in order to counteract Louis XIV's moves in Siam. Now Governor Saunders decided that no time must be lost. He wrote home to the Company urging that the French designs on the island should be forestalled by the planting of an English settlement there, and without waiting for a reply despatched a small expedition under Captain Thomas Taylor to survey the spot. That was in 1752. At the same time he invested Robert Westgarth, a private shipwright at Syriam, with the title of English Resident, and instructed him to do his best to persuade the Court of Pegu to cede Negrais to the English rather than to the French.<sup>2</sup>

The Court of Pegu was strongly averse to making any such grant, and assured Westgarth that it had no intention whatever of allowing the French to have the island. Bruno had been away at Pondicherry when the negotiations began. In the middle of them he returned with a letter from Dupleix, and it was soon obvious that French influence was predominant at Pegu. In the meantime the Directors in London had written to Saunders approving his plan to seize the island and announcing that they were sending out David Hunter, late Deputy Governor of St. Helena, to assume charge of the enterprise. Saunders, however, was in two minds about going on with the venture. Reports from Westgarth and Taylor made him doubtful of the value of the place, and Stringer Lawrence's operations against the French in the Carnatic were absorbing all his spare troops. But when he heard of Bruno's dominating influence at Pegu, he decided that he must act at once. Accordingly he despatched an expedition under Hunter, who took possession of Negrais on 26th April, 1753. It was a tragic blunder. Had he but known it, the Council of the *Compagnie Royale* had firmly rejected Dupleix's grand scheme for gaining control over Lower Burma.<sup>3</sup> Not that that would really have deterred him, had he felt strong enough to disregard his orders; but at the moment he had all his fingers in the Indian pie, and could spare no forces for operations in Burma.

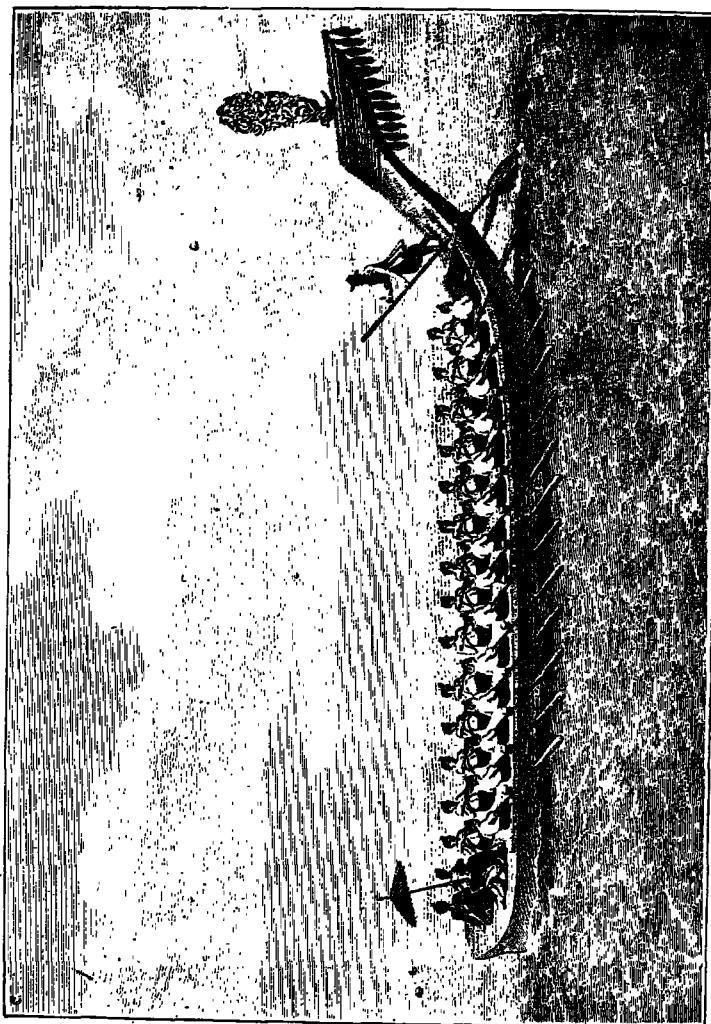
The settlement at Negrais was from the start doomed to failure.

<sup>1</sup> Known to the Burmese as Haing-gyi.

Disease, mismanagement and mutiny paralysed it in its early days. The Mons, unable to attempt military measures against it, organized an effective boycott, which prevented the procurement of either supplies or native labour. When Hunter died in December 1753, no Company's servant of adequate rank could be induced to succeed him. All fought shy of what had come to be regarded as a death-trap. So his second-in-command, Henry Brooke, had to take over. Then an unexpected change came over the situation. Alaungpaya, the new Burmese leader in the north, began a series of successful attacks upon the Mons, and Dupleix, dissatisfied with the obtuse attitude of the Court of Pegu towards Bruno's demands, despatched some boatloads of warlike stores to the Burmese. The Mons in alarm despatched a mission, under a scally-wag Armenian named Nicous, to Madras promising large concessions, including the cession of Negrais, to the English if they would send military aid. Thomas Saunders replied that he must have a treaty, nothing less, recognizing the English position at Negrais and also ceding territory for a trading station at Bassein. But when the draft treaty was presented to Pegu, Bruno persuaded the "perfidious court" to reject it. Dupleix's threat to help the Burmese had very cleverly succeeded in strengthening his hold over the Pegu government.

Late in 1754 Thomas Taylor, returning from Burma ill and worn out, advised that no further dealings should be entertained with the Court of Pegu. Instead, the English should hitch their chariot to the rising star of Alaungpaya. It was already obvious that the Mon power was doomed. Saunders realized the value of this advice. Dupleix had been recalled, and all hope of adequate French help being sent to the Mons was dead. The French had backed the wrong horse. Accordingly, when Alaungpaya pushed his victorious arms as far south as Bassein, and sent ambassadors to Negrais in March 1755 they were favourably received; and Henry Brooke recommended to Madras that military intervention should be undertaken in support of the Burmese. But George Pigot, Saunders's successor at Madras, seeing a new war with France looming on the horizon, would spare no troops. In the meantime Alaungpaya had won a spectacular victory over the Mons at Danubyu and had progressed as far as the historic Buddhist shrine at Dagon, where in great state he made public offerings as the conqueror of the Mons. In token of his victory they renamed the little fishing village





BURMESE WAR BOAT

Rangoon, "the end of strife", and planned to build there a port which should supersede Syriam.

Actually the strife was by no means ended. Pegu, the Mon capital, and the port of Syriam were still unconquered, and their reduction would involve siege operations for which the Burmese army was inadequately equipped. Before he could attempt these, he had to hurry back to deal with trouble elsewhere. The Mani-puris in the far north were raiding. The Shans were rebellious, and a scion of the old Toungoo dynasty was threatening to invade from Siamese territory. Alaungpaya badly needed help and was pressing the English for guns and ammunition. Moreover, Bruno had taken over the defence of Syriam in person, and was desperately seeking help from Pondicherry. Under the circumstances, therefore, Henry Brooke at Negrais deputed Captain George Baker to follow the conqueror back to his capital at Shwebo with a draft treaty exactly identical with the one previously presented to the Court of Pegu. He sent also a present of guns and ammunition.

The negotiations were nearly wrecked by the news that some English ships, including the *Arcot*, specially chartered by Fort St. George for carrying stores to Negrais, and with a Company's servant, John Whitehill, on board, had treacherously joined with French and Mons in an attack upon the Burmese garrison at Rangoon. Alaungpaya was convinced that Henry Brooke was double-crossing him. The gift of military stores, however, appeased him and he expressed himself willing to grant the English trading privileges at Rangoon and Bassein, but managed to shelve the question of a treaty and with it the recognition of the English position at Negrais. Still, he badly needed munitions of war; hence he intimated that the discussions might be resumed at Rangoon, whither he was about to return in order to direct operations against Syriam. Further negotiations accordingly took place early in 1756 at Rangoon with Ensign John Dyer and Dr. William Anderson. Alaungpaya consented to give formal recognition to the Company's settlements in Burma, including Negrais. This was conveyed in a letter inscribed on gold-leaf ornamented with rubies. It was directed to the King of England in person. The Golden Fleet would not demean themselves by an agreement with a mere local official, the "Tsinapatan thimbaw zeit sa" (eater of the port of Chenapamatam, i.e., Madras), as the Governor of Fort St. George was styled. The letter arrived in England early in 1758 and was duly presented to

George II by the Directors through "Mr. Secretary Pitt".

A peculiar interest attaches to this missive as the earliest direct communication from a King of Burma to a King of England. It is also a good example of the style of Burmese court correspondence, and, as such, highly instructive. The translation of it, preserved at the India Office, runs thus:

"The King, Despotick, of great Merit, of great Power, Lord of the Countries Thonahprondah, Tomp Devah and Camboja Sovereign of the Kingdom of Burmars, the Kingdom of Siam and Hughen and the Kingdom of Cassay, Lord of the Mines of Rubies, Gold, Silver, Copper, Iron and Amber, Lord of the White Elephant, Red Elephant and Spotted Elephant, Lord of the Vital Golden Lânce, of many Golden Palaces and of all those Kingdoms, Grandours and Wealth whose royal person is descended of the Nation of the Sun, Salutes the King of England, of Madras, of Bengal, of Fort St. David and of Deve Cotah, and let our Compliments be presented to His Majesty and acquaint him that from the time of Our Ancestors to Our Time, there has been a great Commerce and Trade carry'd on by the English and Burmars, with all possible Liberties, Affection, Advantage and Success, till the time of the Revolution in Pegue, when an entire Stop was put to them and to Our Correspondence, tho' Our inclination and desire of Corresponding with His Majesty and his Subjects remain'd always lively and Constant with Us.

"At the time of the Revolution in Pegue, his Majesty our friend, was pleased to send Mr. Brooke to settle at Negrais the one End of our Kingdom, of which we were apprised after his arrival there, and tho' Jealousy naturally Reigns in Kings, yet We were greatly pleased and Rejoiced at the News, and to give proof of our sincere Amity with His Majesty and his Subjects, we have, on Mr. Brooke's applying to Us in His Majesty's Esteemed Name, given and granted the Place he Wanted at Passaim, and have caused a Deed with Our Seal affixed to it, to be sent to Mr. Brooke, and have Commanded our Governor at Passaim personally, to attend to Measure and deliver up the said desir'd Place, which has accordingly been Done.

"If one King be in Union and Amity with another they may be of Utility to the Interest of each other.

"We and our Generation are inclin'd to preserve a Constant Union and Amity with his Majesty and his Royal Family and Subjects.

"Given the 10th of the Moon of the Month of Cawchong year 1118 Burman style (being April 1756 English style). Let this letter be engraved upon a Golden Plate, and forwarded to the King of England."

Through a most unfortunate oversight no suitable reply from His Britannic Majesty was ever returned to King Alaungpaya, and there is reason to believe that he came to the conclusion that he had been either wantonly insulted or craftily tricked. A day was to come when he was to take a fearful revenge for this unpardonable slight. The explanation of the English apathy is not far to seek. Long before the Directors received this magnificent missive they had sent out orders to Madras to abandon all operations in Burma. But in those days letters from England to India took a very long time in travelling, and much could happen in the meantime.

In July 1756 Alaungpaya captured Syriam by a surprise night attack and utterly destroyed the city. Upon the French and their confederates the full weight of the King's anger descended. Bruno was roasted to death. Father Nerini, the head of the Catholic Mission to Burma, was beheaded. The rank and file were reduced to slavery and impressed into the Burmese army. Bruno's efforts to save his own skin, when it was obvious that the game was up, were pathetic. During the siege he attempted to negotiate with Alaungpaya, but the Mons discovered the intrigue and placed him under restraint. Two days after the fall of the city, while he was still alive, two French vessels, the *Galatee* and the *Fleury*, laden with troops and military stores from Pondicherry, put into the Rangoon River and sent up a boat for a pilot. The boat fell into Burmese hands. The required pilot was sent down in a country boat bearing a letter, which the King forced Bruno to write, decoying the ships up the river. The trick was successful. On the way up the pilot skilfully ran both ships aground, so that they fell an easy prey to the Burmese war boats. Their cargoes were extremely welcome to Alaungpaya. He spared the lives of some 200 of their crews and impressed them into his army. All the officers, however, were beheaded.

Then he addressed himself to the task of reducing Pegu. The Mon capital held out until May 1757, when it was destroyed as Syriam had been. While the siege was on he applied again and again to Negrais for munitions, paying cash down for them. But his demands were insatiable and he was so annoyed at the inability

of the English to comply with them to the full, that he intimated that when he had reduced Pegu, he would dislodge the English from Negrais. When, however, Pegu was finally destroyed, he did not carry out his threat. Instead, he summoned Captain Thomas Newton, the Chief at Negrais, to meet him at Prome on his return journey to his capital. Newton thought it imprudent to leave his post at such a time, so he deputed Ensign Robert Lester as "ambassador extraordinary" to the King and sent along with him the best present the settlement could afford, a four-pounder cannon.)

Lester fell in with the royal flotilla as it plied its triumphant way slowly up the Irrawaddy. It was the height of the rainy season, and his boat was most inadequately protected against the weather. To make things worse, his official interpreter, Antonio, treated him with studied insolence. "I meet with many things amongst these people, that would try the most patient man ever existed," he wrote in his journal, "but as I hope it is for the good of the gentlemen I serve, I shall put up with them and proceed." To his great disgust as a British officer he had to be presented to the King on board the royal barge minus his sword and shoes. The interview was a lengthy one, and the envoy had to remain throughout it in a kneeling position. After a time, in an agony of discomfort, he tried surreptitiously to draw up a low stool with which to ease his cramped limbs. The King, who was in a good humour, was immensely amused at the manoeuvre, and graciously told him to sit down.

During the interview the King plied Lester with all manner of questions. Why did the English want a treaty? Was not the gold plate, which he had sent to the King of England, a sufficient guarantee? And why did the English not leave Negrais and settle at Bassein? Lester replied that Negrais was the key to the river, and the English wished to prevent the French from seizing it. If a treaty were concluded, he said, they would make Bassein their headquarters, and leave only a small garrison at Negrais. Then the King asked if Lester could point a gun and kill a man at a great distance, did he understand the use of cannon, was there as much rain in England as in Burma, why did he wear a shoulder knot, how much was his monthly salary, and why did Englishmen not tattoo their bodies like the Burmese; and His Majesty stood up and proudly exposed his own tattooed thigh to the amused and rather bewildered envoy. He then felt Lester's hand and expressed his opinion that the

English were like women because they did not tattoo. When in reply to another question about English weather Lester told him that he had personally seen the Thames frozen over and an ox roasted whole upon it, the King and all present roared with laughter. Then with a gleam of mischief the King enquired whether the English were afraid of the French. Lester stoutly replied that "there never was that Englishman born, that was afraid of a Frenchman". The King also was moved to indulge in a little bombast. If all the powers of the world were to come, he said, he could drive them out of his country. Thus everything passed off most amicably, and Lester was able to return to Negrais with the treaty, duly ratified, in his pocket. It provided for the cession of Negrais and a piece of land at Bassein. In return the Company pledged itself to present the King of Burma annually with a twelve-pounder and 200 viss of gunpowder, and to aid him against all his enemies by land and sea to the utmost of their ability. Dalrymple prints a copy of it in his *Oriental Repertory*, but Aitchison pointedly omits it from his monumental collection of the East India Company's treaties.

It proved to be a useless document. The conditions, which had produced the original impulse for such an arrangement had passed away. Dupleix was no longer in India. Bruno was dead. Burma was united. And both the English and the French were too much occupied elsewhere to devote any attention for the time being to Burmese policy. In fact by the time the King's seal was affixed to the document both London and Madras were concerned solely with the question of withdrawal from Burma. They were heartily sick of the Negrais adventure. The first steps towards evacuating the island were taken early in 1759, when Captain Thomas Newton and the majority of the garrison were transferred to Calcutta. A few months later Captain Southby arrived from Bengal to superintend the removal of the valuable supplies of teak which had been stored at the abandoned station. On the day after his arrival he was entertaining the Portuguese Antonio, previously Lester's interpreter, then Governor of Bassein, when, at a signal from his guest, overwhelming numbers of Burmese soldiers, secretly collected, rushed the fort, massacred the whole staff including Southby and his colleagues, and then proceeded to make a huge bonfire of the whole settlement. Every man, woman or child they could lay their hands on, and there was a large number of Indian labourers and

servants attached to the fort, was mercilessly done to death. A midshipman, a ship's carpenter and a few Indians managed to get away to one of the ships which lay in the roadstead. Two of the English assistants with three soldiers locked themselves in an upper room. They were not spotted until the Burmese had finished plundering the warehouses. Then they were promised their lives if they surrendered. They did so. One of them, who was badly wounded, was kicked down a fourteen-feet ladder, which he was unable to negotiate, and run through with a lance as he struggled to get up. The others were treated with surprising clemency, being transported to Rangoon where they were held as prisoners of war.

The causes of this dramatic outrage are not far to seek. Robertson, one of the prisoners at Rangoon, wrote to the Bengal Council saying that he was taken before Alaungpaya, who told him that three years earlier he had sent a letter inscribed on gold plate ornamented with rubies to the King of England and had received no answer. Hence he had come to the conclusion that the English regarded him and his people as fools. He told him also that he had not forgotten John Whitehill's treachery in assisting the Mon attack upon Rangoon. This, however, is not the whole story. The spark which actually fired the gunpowder was supplied by an Armenian named Gregory, who was chief Customs Officer at Rangoon.

During the cold season of 1758-9, while Alaungpaya was leading a great raid into Manipur, a desperate Mon rebellion had broken out in Lower Burma. It was stamped out with ruthless ferocity, but not before the Mons had massacred a large number of Burmese. Alaungpaya had been furiously angry when news of it reached him. Gregory had thereupon invented a slanderous story accusing the English at Negrais of supplying the rebels with a large quantity of arms and ammunition. He proceeded to warn the King that the English were a very dangerous people, and if not prevented in time, would act in the same manner as they had in Bengal and on the Coromandel Coast. They began by making settlements like the one at Negrais; then by degrees they fortified themselves and quietly increased their military reserves until they felt themselves strong enough to pull off the mask and assume political control over the territories in which they settled. On hearing this story the King had ordered Antonio, the Governor of Bassein, and a French Eurasian named Lavine to go on a bogus mission to Negrais and

capture the place. They were, however, to save alive as many as possible of their prisoners so that they might be held to ransom. The vitriolic hatred of the English cherished by Lavine caused the real plan to go astray in the operation, since it was easy to represent that they had been forced to take extreme measures. And the fact that they did bring a few English prisoners alive to Rangoon could be used as evidence of their bona fides. It is an illuminating story. The Armenians were widely spread as merchants and adventurers throughout the East. Many of them held high positions in the service of native states, and bitterly resented the amazing growth of British influence at this time. There was a fair-sized community of them in Burma, which they regarded very much as their own preserve.

The Bengal Council now had a knotty problem to solve. Revenge was out of the question. The English position in India was too weak to admit of any such measures. Equally, an irreconcilable breach with Alaungpaya must be avoided, if possible, since it would be equivalent to inviting the French to try their luck once more in Burma. Burmese ports offered peculiar advantages for attacks upon English communications in the Bay of Bengal. Moreover, there were English prisoners at Rangoon for whose liberation some effort must be made. Hence, after much serious searching of mind, it was decided to send an envoy to seek the release of the prisoners and the restoration of English property. Captain Alves was deputed to undertake this delicate task. He left Bengal in February 1760 bearing a letter to Alaungpaya composed in terms of studied moderation.

Alves, as might be expected, had a most unpleasant time. He found Alaungpaya dead and his son and successor, Naungdawgyi, busy quelling the usual rebellion which greeted a new ruler. The King expressed lofty surprise at Alves's requests. He said that the Governor of Negrais had not only supplied the Mons with arms but had gone shares with them in the plunder of Burmese boats. As to the massacre, Burmese soldiers might kill whom they pleased, and in any case those who were slain were fated to end their lives in that way. This, of course, was the pure milk of Burmese Buddhist doctrine. Religion forbade the Buddhist to shed blood, but the Burmese circumvented the difficulty by means of this useful adaptation of the doctrine of *Karma*. One important fact, however, was in Alves's favour: the King had not yet succeeded in subduing the

rebels, who were holding the city of Ava, and he badly needed munitions of war. Hence, although Alves could not promise that the Company would consent to any re-establishment of its trade with Burma, Naungdawgyi granted the release of the prisoners, and the evacuation of such English property as had escaped destruction.

Alves quitted the Court in disgust and returned to Calcutta. Before he left, however, he was the witness of a pretty little scene. Gregory had told the King another of his fictitious stories, pretending that three ships laden with stores had arrived for the resettlement of Negrais. Alves, however, was able to prove to the King before Gregory's face that this was a lie. Then the full torrent of royal wrath poured out upon the crouching Armenian. He was so expert in advancing his rank that he would next assume the title of king, shouted the outraged monarch. Why did he not go to his comrade across the river, the rebel leader at Ava? Let him never show his face at Court again. Then, as Gregory hesitated to leave the audience chamber, he was seized upon by the attendants and dragged ignominiously out of the palace. It was, of course, all very good pantomime and nothing more. Before Alves left Rangoon for Calcutta, Gregory was restored to royal favour and appointed Chief Customs Officer at Bassein.

When Alves presented his report, both Madras and Calcutta decided that it was useless to maintain any further establishment in Burma. The Bassein station was closed and for many years official relations ceased between John Company and the Lord of the White Elephant, the Red Elephant and the Spotted Elephant. The victory at Wandewash in 1760 had completed the downfall of French military power in India. By the Treaty of Paris three years later such stations as were restored to them were to be held as trading posts only. It was therefore anticipated that there was no further likelihood of trouble from them in Burma. And it was felt that adequate supplies of teak could be obtained through the normal operations of licensed private traders. Above all, a second disaster of the Negrais type was to be avoided at all costs.

The French, however, continued to take a lively interest in Burma. A new agent, Lefèvre, journeyed from Pondicherry to Ava in 1766 and obtained not only the release of the survivors of the Frenchmen enslaved by Alaungpaya at the time of the capture of Syriam but also permission to open a shipbuilding yard at Rangoon.

This was soon busy turning out ships of various sizes up to one of 1,500 tons. French and English were again at war in 1778, when France supported the Americans in their struggle for independence. Once more the islands of Bourbon and Mauritius were the centres of great naval activity. Bussy and Suffren used Burmese ports for refitting, and French privateers, preying on English commerce, used Mergui and Rangoon as havens of refuge. But there were no signs of renewed French political intrigues in Burma. Suffren who was exceptionally intelligent did indeed advocate such a policy. He told the government at Versailles that Burma was the country through which English power in the East might be attacked with the greatest advantage. Apparently some scheme was mooted for transferring the French headquarters from India to some point on the coast of Burma. But Bussy reported that it was impracticable and nothing more came of it. For the time being therefore the English under the hard-pressed Warren Hastings were not called upon to counter another big French move on the eastern side of the Bay of Bengal. They had quite enough on their hands in India. As things turned out, the war of 1778-1783 ultimately brought the French establishment at Rangoon to a standstill. It closed down and was never reopened.

The interest of the episode recounted in this chapter will readily be appreciated. It both illuminates and supplements the story of the Anglo-French struggle for dominance in India, which reached its decisive phase during the Seven Years' War, 1756-63. The decisive battles were fought at sea; Lagos and Quiberon Bay in the Seven Years' War, the Battle of the Saints in the War of American Independence. They were fought far away from the Indian Ocean, but they decided the fate of French sea-power there. Viewed in their light the Anglo-French struggles in Burma may perhaps seem insignificant. But it is interesting to speculate on what the course of subsequent history might have been, had the French been strong enough and sufficiently seaminded to have followed up the line indicated by Dupleix and Suffren.

## *Chapter IX*

### BURMA'S FOREIGN TRADE UNDER THE ALAUNGPAYA DYNASTY

ALTHOUGH THE ENGLISH BROKE OFF OFFICIAL RELATIONS WITH Burma for some thirty-five years after 1760, and the French closed down shipbuilding operations in Rangoon some twenty years later, and never resumed them, there is much interesting information available concerning the trade and products of the country during the Alaungpaya dynasty's first half-century of rule. Much of it indeed has been published, but in works which have long been forgotten and of which, with the exception of Father Sangermano's book, very few copies seem to exist to-day. The earliest of these is the work of an army surgeon, Dr. William Hunter, who visited Rangoon in 1782. He was on his way from Bengal to join a regiment in the Carnatic in July of that year, when his ship, the *Success Galley*, was dismasted in a monsoon storm, and had to put into the new Burmese port for repairs. While there he was so much impressed by what he considered the unjustifiable neglect of Burmese trade by British India that he collected what information he could and published a little book at Calcutta, afterwards reprinted and issued in London in 1789 by J. Sewell, Cornhill, and J. Debrett, Piccadilly. It is entitled *A Concise Account of the Climate, Produce, Trade, Government, Manners and Customs of the Kingdom of Pegu, interspersed with Remarks Moral and Political.* Luckily the book is more concise than its title. It gives an excellent picture of conditions at Rangoon. Copies of it are to-day exceedingly rare.

In his Introduction Hunter gives the following illuminating picture of European methods of trade in the days of unregulated intercourse: "The trade of Pegu has never been esteemed a national concern; it has been always very limited, and carried on by a few private adventurers, who were in general such as had not a capital sufficient to begin any other branch of commerce. Any man who could find money enough to purchase a small vessel on the Coast of Coromandel, might, by carrying a little tobacco, some blue

cloth, and a few iron nails, to the island of Carnicobar, get in exchange for these articles, which had cost him almost nothing, a shipload of coconuts; for these he could procure at Pegu a cargo of wood, which he afterwards sold to great advantage either on the Coast or in Bengal."

He lays particular stress upon the teak trade as the chief magnet which attracted Europeans to Rangoon. The country not only produced more teak, but it was cheaper and of better quality than could be obtained elsewhere. For instance, ships built at Rangoon lasted longer than those built of Indian teak at Bombay. He was impressed by the strategic importance of the Burma teak supply. If a naval war developed in the Bay of Bengal, the side which could obtain Burma teak would have a great advantage over the other, since after naval engagements it could refit its ships with greater speed and more effectually than the enemy. Such a consideration would naturally be uppermost in his mind, since in the year 1782 we were at war with France, and French ships had made much use of Burmese harbours for repairs. The standard of craftsmanship at Rangoon was evidently far higher than that which had prevailed at Syriam in the old days. There were many Siamese shipbuilders there, who had been captured in the recent wars. The Burmese had also learnt a great deal about ship-building and navigation from Europeans, and there were excellent carpenters to be had. The real trouble was, however, that the whole trade was carried on in too haphazard a fashion. The wood cut in the great nurseries in the mountains was made up into rafts and floated down the river, taking several months over the journey. The time of their arrival was uncertain and often after an interval several rafts would arrive together. The English, he thought, ought to have permanent agents on the spot to choose wood of the right quality and dimensions on its arrival. Moreover, experts should be appointed to superintend the actual cutting of the wood in the forests.

In the year following Dr. Hunter's visit to Rangoon Father Sangermano arrived to superintend the Catholic mission in Burma. During the next twenty-five years his sterling character and attractive personality brought him into friendly contact with Burmese officials, foreign traders and members of English diplomatic missions; and he acquired that remarkable knowledge of things Burmese, which in later life he embodied in his valuable work *A*

*Description of the Burmese Empire.*<sup>1</sup> He made such an excellent chart of the Port of Rangoon for the English authorities at Calcutta that they rewarded him with a pension. He tells us that up to 1790 Bassein was of equal importance with Rangoon as a port. But in that year one of the sons of King Bodawpaya became its governor and "committed so many and such cruel injustices and vexations" that foreign merchants afterwards gave it a wide berth. From that time Rangoon became not only the principal port of Burma, but the only one of any importance.

Sangermano confirms Hunter's statements about the teak trade. All the ships, he says, that went there in those days, returned with cargoes of teak. Most ships, while in harbour at Rangoon, would be careened and refitted, and there were two or three English and French shipwrights who carried on this work there.<sup>2</sup> He thought that one reason for the amount of this kind of work done there lay in the fact that when a foreign merchant had sold his cargo and taken in one of teak wood, he had a large balance of cash in his hands, and as he was prohibited from carrying specie out of the country, he laid out his money in repairs or shipbuilding.

Further valuable information about this subject was compiled by Captain Hiram Cox, who was appointed Resident at Rangoon by the Governor General of India in 1797, and about whose experiences as such more will be said in the next chapter. He wrote a most comprehensive memorandum on the products and trade of Burma for the Indian Government, which was not published in his journal,<sup>3</sup> but was made use of by Major William Franklin in 1801, when commissioned by Lord Wellesley to draw up a full statement on Burmese affairs for his guidance.<sup>4</sup> Cox was of opinion that there existed an ill-founded prejudice against Burma teak, due, he thought, to bad shipbuilding practices at Rangoon. Whereas at Bombay the builders were all professional men, jealous of their reputation, who were careful to use nothing but teak in the construction of the frames of their ships, at Rangoon they were merely sea-faring

<sup>1</sup>Published in Rome in 1833. English translation by William Tandy reprinted by Government Press, Rangoon, 1885.

<sup>2</sup>Captain Symes reported to Sir John Shore in 1795 that a Mr. Dyer was the only respectable Englishman residing in the country. There were eight or ten others who were "very worthless". The number of Frenchmen there was over sixty. They withdrew from notice as much as possible.

<sup>3</sup>*Journal of a Residence in the Burmese Empire* (London, 1821).

<sup>4</sup>Published in London in 1811 under the title *Treats, Political, Geographical and Commercial, on the Dominions of Ava, etc.*

men, who had taken up the trade, and whose objects were cheapness and despatch. Thus, they used a common green junglewood, called *soondree* in Bengal and *beema* at Rangoon, for ships' frames. It was not only very cheap, but nails driven into the green wood held without clenching, which saved iron. But as soon as the sap dried, the wood became brittle, and after a few years ships built in this way had a nasty habit of foundering in heavy seas, through their backs breaking.

That was indeed the experience of Captain Eastwick, the writer of some thrilling memoirs, who was wrecked off Cape Negrais in one of these ships in August 1793. A heavy monsoon sea broke up his ship as she rounded the Cape, and he was almost the sole survivor of the wreck. But ships built with teakwood frames were exceptionally buoyant and were remarkable for long life. Sangermano comments on cases where they remained afloat even when filled with water. Sonnerat<sup>1</sup> says there were ships still plying in his day which were a hundred years old. Cox also testified to the exceptional durability of Burma teak ships. Moreover, he mentioned the fact that when he was in Rangoon the teak timbers of the old stockade were taken up and found to be as fresh and sound as when first planted in Alaungpaya's day, forty years earlier. His memorandum contains a useful comparative statement of ship-building costs at Rangoon and the chief Indian centres. A ship built at Rangoon, coppered and equipped ready for the sea in European style cost £12-£13 a ton, as against £13-£14 at Cochin and Daman, £14-£15 at Surat, £16-£17 at Calcutta and £19-£20 at Bombay. He thought that if the teak trade of Burma could be properly organized, Calcutta ought to be able to turn out Burma teak ships of 800 tons burthen at £15 a ton, and in fact even cheaper still if the English had their own timber-mills in Burma.

There is no doubt that when Dr. Hunter laid it down that the only way for the teak trade to be put upon a satisfactory footing would be for experts to be appointed to deal with the actual selection and extraction of the timber in the forests, he put his finger upon the vital spot. The great obstacle to such a procedure lay in the graft of the local authorities, not in any difficulty raised by royal policy. The Chief Customs Officer and other Burmese high officials at Rangoon reaped a rich harvest out of the trade, by systematically

<sup>1</sup>*Voyage aux Indes Orientales et à la Chine, 1774-1781* (Paris, 1782). English translation by Francis Magnus published at Calcutta, 1788.

cornering any particular denomination of timber for which there was a special demand. And until shippers were prepared to pay their price, their ships could lade no cargoes. The Chief Customs Officer<sup>1</sup> was always a European, appointed on account of his knowledge of European ways. He was, according to most accounts, successfully engaged upon feathering his nest. For this it was necessary to prevent any complaints getting through to Ava. Hence, he had to have all the other Burmese officials of the port in his pocket. Thus they formed a close ring able to dictate their terms to foreign traders. Complaints of this sort seem to have come in frequently to the British Indian Government in the reign of Bodawpaya, and were accepted by it as genuine.

Dr. Hunter in 1782 had condemned what he called the "mortifying treatment" of ships visiting Rangoon. "As soon as they come to anchor, the guns and rudder are carried on shore, and not delivered again till the business is concluded, and the ship has permission to depart. It frequently happens that difficulties are thrown in the way, by some individual in power, which detain the trader much longer than would be necessary to finish all his commercial transactions; and, besides, he is often obliged to bear with patience, because without any prospect of redress, the most shocking personal indignities. As this behaviour has rendered the trade of Pegu much less considerable than it otherwise would have been, and retarded the advancement of the country, both in richness and civilization, it will, doubtless, appear to be very impolitic." There was, however, he believed, a very real reason for the Burmese attitude towards Europeans. They had a strong desire to maintain their independence at all costs. They feared that if foreign traders built forts and factories in their country, it would be the thin end of the wedge, as in the case of India, and they would gradually gain complete control over the country. Apart from that, however, the Burmese had the highest respect for the East India Company, and they treated his ship with every consideration.

This same custom was also commented upon by the French writer Sonnerat. "The Japanese customs," he writes, "are in use at Pegu. As soon as a vessel anchors before Rangoon, the governor immediately sends his orders for the guns and rudder to be sent on shore. a faithful account is obliged to be given of the ship's crew, the arms offensive and defensive, the number of bales of goods, and

<sup>1</sup>Usually known as *Shahbunder* in eastern ports.

commonly of everything else on board. They separate what is for the defence and use of the ship from what is to be disposed of, and after this declaration the governor orders a warehouse, where everything must be deposited. Till this last article is completely finished, there is no communication. After all is done, the governor goes on board the vessel with a numerous retinue, who are benefited by the entertainment which is obliged to be given him, and if he finds anything on board which has not been reported, even if it was money, he confiscates it. An officer can keep no more than twenty rupees, for the money must be stored as well as the goods; however, with this difference, that it pays no duty, and is carefully returned. The visit finished, the governor receives the usual presents, which consist of china, plate, sugar, and boxes of tea. The operations of commerce are often retarded by these preliminaries, as no workman can be procured, if he is ever so much wanted, till they are all entirely fulfilled.

"A second visit is paid to all the goods deposited in the magazine. The bales are open for payment of the duties; those of the king consist of 10 per cent in kind, as they count out nine pieces, and the tenth is the king's: the clerks, warehousekeepers, and the person who chaps<sup>1</sup> the goods, have a duty of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. One of the chiefs has also the right of taking five pieces, but not goods of value, as cloths or other high-priced merchandise. After all these examinations, the vessel has permission to be loaded."

Such were the current strictures of that period upon the treatment of European traders by the Burmese. And historical writers have without exception accepted them as a true picture of the actual state of affairs. But let us remember that they were written by visitors with little or no real experience of the country and unable to speak the language. They were based mainly upon the gossip of sea-faring men at the ports. Luckily we have a far more reliable statement. It is a letter on the subject written in 1795 by a Mr. Robert Dyer, a resident at Rangoon to whom reference has already been made above. He writes:

"During the time of my residence at this place which is between six and seven years, I never have met with any ill treatment, from any of the Government. I therefore have no reason for complaint. Europeans enjoy many privileges not granted to the natives of the country.

<sup>1</sup>Hindustani *chhap*=seal, impression or stamp.

"The laws and customs of the country being so very different from that (*sic*) of our own, Europeans in general make great difficulties in strictly complying with them, which is the cause of many complaints between them and the Government.

"There are many English vessels which come trading to this port which do not bring sufficient funds for purchasing a returning cargo. Those persons meet with great difficulties and detentions in the transacting of their business at this port.

"Vessels whom the commanders are strangers at the port, frequently meet with many difficulties by disposing of their cargoes to people of bad character, which often is the occasion of disputes with the Government, besides the detention of the vessel.

"A few years ago there was some reason for complaint being made against the Government of this place, which was occasioned by frequent changes taking place in the Government. It sometimes happened that the town was left three or four months in the year without any of the heads of the Government being there, at which time both the merchants and commanders of vessels found much difficulty in transacting this business.

"Those who are now in the Government here have been four or five years in office, and begin now to be well acquainted with the mode of settling disputes between the European and natives, which are in general left to the arbitration of some of our own countrymen."

This is obviously a fair and balanced statement, which shows how carefully on our guard we must be before accepting the sweeping condemnation of Burmese methods so often meted out by writers who have not really sifted the evidence. Of course, there were bad cases of injustice, of venal officials, and even of barbarous cruelty. There is no smoke without fire, and Burma would not have gained so bad a reputation for her treatment of foreign traders entirely without justification. But in the days of unregulated trade he was the resort of all kinds of 'bad hats', often criminals flying from justice, not to mention shady prospectors of an empire-building propensity. Hence there was some justification for the Burmese attitude of suspicion, which led them, for instance, to disarm all ships entering their ports. A well-armed European ship could pretty easily have held to ransom a petty little port like Rangoon. And be it not forgotten that although Hunter condemns Burmese treatment of foreign ships in general, he admits that his own was handsomely dealt with. Moreover, misunderstandings

must have easily arisen on both sides of a sort that could become extremely unpleasant, when one takes into consideration the characteristic outlook of each. The Burmese were infused with immense national pride:<sup>1</sup> arrogance it was termed by Europeans. They were a victorious nation, absolutely ignorant of the great world far beyond their frontiers, and hence with a childlike belief in their ability to conquer wherever they directed their energies. Eighteenth century Europeans on the other hand, with their consciousness of superior technique and their innate preconceptions of racial superiority, regarded the whole East as their oyster. And the European traders who went to Burma expected to be allowed to indulge their get-rich-quickly tastes without let or hindrance. Small wonder that they were intensely annoyed by the "mortifying treatment" imposed upon them by Burmese governmental methods and national customs. And their Armenian, Malabari and Moslem competitors in the Burmese market were adepts in spreading the worst possible rumours against the English in particular.

One feature of the Burmese treatment of foreigners, whose lot it was to make a protracted stay in their country, has been specially commented on by many writers from sixteenth-century Linschoten onwards. It was their long-established practice to provide them with wives, even if they were royal slaves taken captive in war or cast ashore by reason of shipwreck. Alexander Hamilton, who visited the country early in the 18th century, describes the practice thus:

"The women are very courteous and kind to strangers, and are very fond of marrying with Europeans, and most part of the strangers who trade thither, marry a wife for the term they stay. The children cannot be carried out of the Kingdom without the King's permission, but that may be purchased for 40 or 50 pounds sterling, and if an irreconcilable quarrel happen where there are children, the father is obliged to take care of the boys, and the mother of the girls. If a husband is content to continue the marriage, whilst he goes to foreign countries about his affairs, he must leave some fund to pay her about six shillings and eight pence per month, otherwise at the year's end she may marry again; but if that sum is paid her on his account, she is obliged to stay the term of three years, and she is never the worse, but rather the better looked on, that she has been married to several European husbands."

<sup>1</sup>"Les Pegouans," said Lieutenant Flouest in 1783, "méprisent souverainement les étrangers" (T'oung Pao I, p. 16).

We have already noted the same kind of conditions prevailing in 17th century Arakan. From all accounts the wives, for whom no permission whatever could be obtained to leave the country, were so attractive that many husbands resorted to all sorts of stratagems to smuggle them away with them. With exceptional charm they have always combined strong business acumen and intense loyalty to the interests of their husbands. And for this reason many a European husband has 'gone Burmese' and adopted the country as his permanent home.

Besides their interest in the teak trade, Englishmen during the later years of the 18th century were searching everywhere for new supplies of raw cotton. Crompton's "mule" and Cartwright's power loom were causing an enormous demand, and although new sources of supply were being developed in the Southern States of North America, Lancashire's needs were almost insatiable. Merchants, who visited Upper Burma, reported on the long-established export of raw cotton up the Irrawaddy and across into Yunnan via Bhamo. When Captain Sorrel<sup>1</sup> was at the capital he took especial note of the trade. He told Sir John Shore that the Burmese exporters even offered to take him with them on the journey to China. Thus once more there revived in English minds the idea of using Burma as the back-door into China.

Captain Cox also collected information about this trade. The Chinese, he wrote, thought kindly of the Burma brand of cotton, from which they made nankeens. The city of Sagaing was the staple whence the boats carrying cotton started off for China. Each boat carried a hundred baskets of a hundred viss weight apiece, and the journey took from thirty to forty days. He suggested that the English should attempt to divert this trade to the port of Bassein. He gives no idea of the total volume of the trade, but states that cotton was Burma's chief export to China. In return raw silk, woven silk, velvets, brocades, gold leaf, gold thread, carpets, drugs, copper, coloured paper, dried fruits, sweetmeats, sugar candy, coarse tea, copper and copper pots, cutlery, ironmongery, toys and silver were imported from China.

Other Burma exports by sea to India and elsewhere were earth oil from Yenangyaung, sold in Rangoon at Rs. 1-3-11 per Bengal maund, cutch (i.e., resin from the cassia tree), which was exported to the extent of upwards of 400,000 viss annually; cardamums,

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter X.

produced in Martaban for sale on the Coromandel Coast, and arsenic, of which the supply was said to have been considerable. Plenty of rice was obtainable in Rangoon at 8 annas a maund, but its export was prohibited. Ships might carry away only so much as they actually required for provisions. The export of ivory and silver was also prohibited, but both were apparently smuggled out of the country. Cox mentions a long list of further products such as tobacco, cultivated from time immemorial, sharks' fins and edible birds-nests so beloved by the Chinese, shellac, "very expensive", jaggaree "made from the sap of the tear-tree", lead and tin, amber from the Chindwin region, and indigo, still manufactured in a "rude way", as the Dutch had reported a century and a half earlier. He also describes a coarse and dark paper made from "macerated filaments of bamboo". "Of this kind they manufacture the black books in common use in the country called Purbeck,<sup>1</sup> also Kitta sols<sup>2</sup>."

On the subject of the much-discussed precious stones of Burma, like many writers before him, Cox shows how government policy had practically killed the trade in them. "The trade in those articles might be infinitely more extended, did not the jealous policy of government prohibit the export of valuables of any kind; and they are particularly strict with respect to the ruby mines, so that no subject can possess a ruby above the value of 400 tecals. ~~But~~ But as the mines would be comparatively unproductive unless some inducement was held out to the miners, his majesty allows them to sell all rubies under the above value, as also sapphires, garnets, etc. to the Mahomedan and Malabar natives at Amerapoora (for no strangers or persons of foreign extraction are allowed to approach the mines). Those Mahomedans, etc. polish and sort the different stones, by which they appear to make but a poor livelihood."

European visitors give interesting descriptions of the port of Rangoon during this period. The best-known is that published by Symes in his journal of his embassy to Ava in 1795. It is probably painted in rather too rosy colours, like most of what he wrote about Burma. There is, however, an unpublished, and probably more faithful description from the pen of Dr. Francis Hamilton Buchanan, surgeon to Symes's mission, who while in Burma devoted

<sup>1</sup>Parabaik, used largely for Burmese official records in this period.

<sup>2</sup>Umbrellas.

himself to botanical researches. The record of his travels is in the Home Miscellaneous series of Records at the India Office. Here is his pen-picture of the port:

"Rangoon, having now seen it fully, including its suburbs, may be about a mile in length and a quarter of a mile in breadth. The City or Myoo is a square surrounded by a high palisade, and on the north side by a bad ditch, across which there is a wooden bridge and a causeway leading to the two gates on that side. There is only one gate in each of the other sides. Wooden stages are erected in some places within the palisade, on which men are to be placed in case of attack.\* Each side is about a quarter of a mile in length. On the south towards the river, which is about twenty yards from the fort, are a few huts and three wharves with cranes for landing goods. The middle one is large with two bad stairs, two commodious houses as a kind of exchange, and a kind of wooden fort. The parapet is made in imitation of a ship's side with portholes for the guns, ten or twelve of which in a very miserable condition are mounted, and in a state of being fired, at least for a salute. The streets are narrow and tolerably well paved with brick: most of them are straight. The houses are wood or bamboo, and one storey high, all, like them in other parts of the country, supported on pillars. The Myoowun's house is very like that at Pagoo, surrounded with a mat wall, and is a very poor building. To the east of the town is a small suburb, and to the west and along the new road to the great temple<sup>1</sup> is a very considerable one. The north side of the city is occupied to a considerable distance with burial grounds, temples and convents. Many of these are large and a good deal ornamented, but the greater part are in a state of decay. The whole is close built, and I think must be very populous, perhaps containing ten thousand people." How different from the spacious and beautiful cities of Pegu and Mrauk-u described by Caesar Fredericke, Ralph Fitch and Fra Manrique!

But if Rangoon was cheap and dirty compared with the 16th century cities of Burma and Arakan, not so its majestic pagoda, the Shwe Dagon, whose importance and magnificence had continued to grow with its tale of years. This is how Mrs. Judson, the American missionary, described it in 1817: "The pagoda to which such multitudes resort, is one of the largest and most splendid in the empire. After having ascended a flight of steps, a large gate opens, when a

<sup>1</sup>The Shwe Dagon Pagoda.

produced in Martaban for sale on the Coromandel Coast, and arsenic, of which the supply was said to have been considerable. Plenty of rice was obtainable in Rangoon at 8 annas a maund, but its export was prohibited. Ships might carry away only so much as they actually required for provisions. The export of ivory and silver was also prohibited, but both were apparently smuggled out of the country. Cox mentions a long list of further products such as tobacco, cultivated from time immemorial, sharks' fins and edible birds-nests so beloved by the Chinese, shellac, "very expensive", jaggaree "made from the sap of the tear-tree", lead and tin, amber from the Chindwin region, and indigo, still manufactured in a "rude way", as the Dutch had reported a century and a half earlier. He also describes a coarse and dark paper made from "macerated filaments of bamboo". "Of this kind they manufacture the black books in common use in the country called Purbeck,<sup>1</sup> also Kitta sols<sup>2</sup>."

On the subject of the much-discussed precious stones of Burma, like many writers before him, Cox shows how government policy had practically killed the trade in them. "The trade in those articles might be infinitely more extended, did not the jealous policy of government prohibit the export of valuables of any kind: and they are particularly strict with respect to the ruby mines, so that no subject can possess a ruby above the value of 400 tecals. But as the mines would be comparatively unproductive unless some inducement was held out to the miners, his majesty allows them to sell all rubies under the above value, as also sapphires, garnets, etc. to the Mahomedan and Malabar natives at Amerapoora (for no strangers or persons of foreign extraction are allowed to approach the mines). Those Mahomedans, etc. polish and sort the different stones, by which they appear to make but a poor livelihood."

European visitors give interesting descriptions of the port of Rangoon during this period. The best-known is that published by Symes in his journal of his embassy to Ava in 1795. It is probably painted in rather too rosy colours, like most of what he wrote about Burma. There is, however, an unpublished, and probably more faithful description from the pen of Dr. Francis Hamilton Buchanan, surgeon to Symes's mission, who while in Burma devoted

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<sup>2</sup>Umbrellas.

## *Chapter X*

### THE ARAKAN FRONTIER QUESTION

#### (a) THE REVIVAL OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY

1784-1819  
IN 1784 KING BODAWPAYA OF BURMA CONQUERED THE ANCIENT kingdom of Arakan, thereby bringing the Burmese frontier up to the River Naaf and the unadministered tracts further inland to the south and south-east of the district of Chittagong. Thus Burma became the immediate neighbour of British India. Many Arakanese fled before the Burmese armies and made their way over the frontier into British territory, where they soon established flourishing colonies. As they were good cultivators and settled in sparsely populated areas, the British authorities were at first favourably inclined towards them. But year by year this movement of emigration continued unabated; the Arakanese were in a constant state of rebellion in their own country, and the ferocity of Burmese reprisals led to an unending stream of refugees. Bodawpaya developed a flair for undertaking great works of merit according to the Buddhist conception, such as the construction of lakes and pagodas. These were on such a scale that huge levies of forced labour had to be made. Arakan was one of the districts where his officers conscripted man-power.

The climax came during the period 1790-1797 when he set out to build at Mingun the biggest pagoda ever. It was to have been a solid mass of masonry 500 feet high, but it was never completed. The huge partly-built monstrosity can still be seen in the Sagaing district not far from Mandalay. For the second time in Burmese history people began to murmur: "The pagoda is finished and the country is ruined." The first occasion had been in 1274 just before the collapse of the Pagan monarchy before Kublai Khan's armies. The Burmese demands for Arakanese labour became so insupportable that in 1794 a large-scale rebellion arose, which was assisted by armed bands of Arakanese from the Chittagong district. The insurrection was suppressed, as usual with fiendish cruelty. More

produced in Martaban for sale on the Coromandel Coast, and arsenic, of which the supply was said to have been considerable. Plenty of rice was obtainable in Rangoon at 8 annas a maund, but its export was prohibited. Ships might carry away only so much as they actually required for provisions. The export of ivory and silver was also prohibited, but both were apparently smuggled out of the country. Cox mentions a long list of further products such as tobacco, cultivated from time immemorial, sharks' fins and edible birds-nests so beloved by the Chinese, shellac, "very expensive", jaggaree "made from the sap of the tear-tree", lead and tin, amber from the Chindwin region, and indigo, still manufactured in a "rude way", as the Dutch had reported a century and a half earlier. He also describes a coarse and dark paper made from "macerated filaments of bamboo". "Of this kind they manufacture the black books in common use in the country called Purbeck,<sup>1</sup> also Kitta sols<sup>2</sup>."

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erected for him. The chief minister was at pains to supply him with everything he needed, and when he left, a letter from the King to the Governor-General was entrusted to him, which was said to have been conciliatory in tone and to have expressed the royal desire for the re-establishment of good relations. Unfortunately, on its return journey, Sorrel's vessel ran aground and perished off the island of Saugar at the mouth of the Hugli, the letter was lost, and Sorrel himself was the sole survivor of the disaster. He was able, however, to give the British authorities a full account of his mission, from which Shore judged that an official embassy would be welcomed by the King. His conclusion was that if the Burmese were as ignorant of the British as the latter were of them, a dangerous situation might only too easily arise. He did not take a serious view of the Burmese conduct in violating the Chittagong frontier; the fact that they had made no attack upon British troops when they met them, suggested to him that they entertained no ideas of conquest in that region.

Symes therefore was sent to Burma on a mission of friendship, to remove all causes of distrust, and to obtain all possible information "of the products, manufactures, extent, trade, government and nature" of the country. In addition, two further advantages were expected to accrue from the mission. In the first place, as Shore expressed it in a letter home to the Directors, "the great staple of the country is teak timber, nor is there any other place east of Cape Comorin where such as is equally fit for shipbuilding can be procured. This article alone would render a liberal intercourse desirable, but it likewise yields many other valuable commodities, such as silver, tin, sticklack, wax and elephants' teeth, all which might probably be procured on very advantageous terms, if the commercial system was methodized and protected by the supreme authority." What a hope! English administrators never seemed to realize that this very "methodizing" involved doing things that the Burmese neither permitted nor even understood. And as for the question of protection the Burmese had their own views on this subject. If foreigners would bring presents to the King and place their heads under his golden feet, he would vouchsafe them his protection. And he could be very generous, while the mood lasted. No other form of protection, however, could be envisaged; certainly not the sort that a British government desired to give to its nationals.

The second advantage expected by Shore to arise from a resumption of diplomatic relations with Ava was a political one. It was hoped by this means to deprive the French of the use of Burmese harbours, "a circumstance," he wrote, "which would greatly tend to the security of our eastern trade."

Symes went to Burma with a splendid suite, designed to impress the Court with British power, and with a rich present. On arrival he found French influence a very strong factor against him. A French secret agent named Montaigne, was well in with the Rangoon authorities, and through them had transmitted a report on European politics to the Court of Ava. This stated that the English had been totally defeated on the continent by the French, and that as Holland and Spain had now joined Republican France, the utter ruin of Great Britain was imminent. A large French fleet was also said to be on its way to the East, and the warships of Mauritius were cruising where they liked in Indian waters. The Armenian and other competitors of the British added to this a rumour that a combination of Indian powers had been formed, which aimed at expelling them from India. It was to be inferred, they suggested, that if the British overtures did not spring from treachery, they were directed by fear.

Symes was treated with studied coolness, and at his official reception at Court the King did not put in an appearance. He was never actually granted an audience of the King, but was merely permitted to be present on a general audience day. A Chinese mission occupied the front seats, the English were relegated to the back. He was given to understand that the reason for this discourteous behaviour was that it was considered beneath the dignity of the Court of Ava to treat on terms of equality with a subordinate government such as that of Bengal. On a later audience day the members of the English mission were placed in the same row as princes of the blood; the King was present, but took no notice of them. Apart from this they were, in the words of Symes, "handsomely treated", and he excused the Burmese attitude towards his mission as due to "ignorance and misinformation powerfully aided by their own pride". The commander of H.M.S. *Seahorse*, which conveyed the mission, reported that during Symes's absence from Rangoon he and his crew were treated with every mark of civility by the officers of government and with kindness by the people.

Symes brought back a strangely flattering account of the country and the people, as also of the governmental capacity of the Court.<sup>1</sup> He was given by the ministers a list of trading concessions, which he fondly imagined was of the nature and force of a treaty. One of them permitted British agents to go up country and purchase teak on the spot. Another abolished the internal duties collected at the seventeen customs posts which were situated on the river between Rangoon and the capital. Another stated categorically that English merchants might make their complaints to the King in person. Symes was confident that the new regulations would be strictly observed by the Burmese government. He foresaw a great shipbuilding future for Rangoon, and warned Calcutta that it would soon seriously compete with the yards at Bombay or in Bengal. He gave instances of the extreme leniency with which offences committed by Europeans were treated by Burmese magistrates. Although he mentioned all the difficulties he had himself experienced, the general effect of his report was so favourable that it completely misled his government. Shore decided to establish a British Resident at Rangoon to keep Calcutta and Ava in touch with each other, stimulate trade and combat French influence.

In 1796 Captain Hiram Cox was sent to Rangoon in that capacity. He was instructed to do what he could to improve the existing friendly disposition of the Ava government, to keep a careful watch over the conduct of British traders and report to Calcutta any who misconducted themselves, and to make a thorough survey of the "government, arts, commerce, geography and literature of the Burmah Empire." He was to give particular attention to French activities, and to prevent their warships or privateers from obtaining any supplies in Burmese ports.

Like his predecessor Cox afterwards published a full account of his experiences in Burma.<sup>2</sup> It presents an interesting contrast to Symes's book. There were no flies on Cox and he was determined to maintain British prestige and stand no nonsense. At the very outset he neatly caught out Jansey, the Shahbundar of Rangoon, in an attempt to salute his ship with fewer guns than Cox was to use in saluting the flag of Burma. From that moment he decided to agree all matters of etiquette in advance before ful-

<sup>1</sup>Captain Michael Symes: *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom of Ava* (London, 1800).

<sup>2</sup>Captain Hiram Cox: *Journal of a Residence in the Burmhan Empire* (London, 1821).

filling any of his official duties. The Burmese on their part insisted upon recognizing him only in the capacity of a merchant, who had come to superintend commerce. To obtain proper recognition he had to make the long journey up to Amarapoora and present himself before the Golden Feet. There he had to spend nine months on a sandbank in the river in vain endeavours to get his business attended to. At last, in disgust, he quitted the country and returned to Calcutta.

In his report to his government, submitted in July 1797 from Amarapoora, he explained that even before leaving for Burma he had suspected that Captain Symes had been grossly mistaken in his estimate of conditions there. This suspicion had been heightened by the fact that Symes had said to him, "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes," and to his interpreter, "Take care that the Burmhas don't eat your master." It was evident therefore that Symes himself had already come to the conclusion that his report had conveyed a far too rosy impression. One cause of his difficulties, he thought, lay in the fact that Symes had given a bad report of Jansey, the Shahbundar, and his associate, Baba Sheen, to the Myowun,<sup>1</sup> who had shown it to them. Hence they set themselves to wreck his own mission. They had obtained a Burmese translation of Aeneas Anderson's narration of Lord MacCartney's treatment by the Chinese in which it was stated: "We entered the country like paupers, and quitted it like vagrants,"<sup>2</sup> and had used it to instruct the Court of Ava in methods of procedure when dealing with a European mission.

Cox reported further that the Burmese were threatening to invade Bengal on account of the trouble over the Arakanese refugees, and that the commercial concessions brought back by Symes were not worth the paper they were written on; they had all been infringed and there was clear evidence of help being given to French ships in Burmese ports. In fact, the port of Mergui was the common resort of French cruisers.<sup>3</sup> The Burmese, he said, had led Symes about like a wild beast for the amusement of the multitude, and had insulted him with the most audacious mockery. For instance, the Chinese embassy was a begus one composed of poor Chinese residents at the capital, who had been dressed up for the occasion.

<sup>1</sup>Governor of Rangoon.

<sup>2</sup>A. Anderson: *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China, 1792-1794* (London, 1796).

He pointed out that the actual armed strength that the Court of Ava could rely upon for an attack on Bengal was meagre, and that the Burmese were much more afraid of an attack from the British than the latter need be of one from them. And he castigated the Court as an "assemblage of clowns".

The Government of India was completely bewildered by this totally unexpected development in its relations with Burma. It could not really believe that Cox's account must be accepted as a balanced and sane statement of the real situation. Something must have gone wrong with him. Hence it sent what amounted to an apology for his behaviour to the Burmese government and promised to appoint a more acceptable resident in his place. No one, however, was deputed for the thankless task. On more mature reflection it was felt that it would be unwise to court further insults, that the Government of India was not in a position actively to resent. Tippoo and the French in India were a source of grave embarrassment, and London was insistent upon the maintenance of the policy of non-intervention. And 1798 was the year in which Napoleon made his Egyptian expedition.

That same year 1798 saw another great Arakanese exodus into British territory. It was the result of a quarrel between a popular Arakan chief,<sup>1</sup> Nga. Than De, and the Burmese authorities. He was a very influential leader, who had actually invited King Bodawpaya to conquer Arakan in 1784, and had subsequently ruled the country for the Burmese. Now the state to which his people were reduced, and the insatiable royal demands for man-power, caused him in desperation to seek refuge in Chittagong. No less than ten thousand of his people followed him. The British authorities permitted them to settle at a place named Harbang, many miles to the north of the frontier. By this time there were not far short of fifty thousand of these refugees in the Company's territory. Many of them had settled down in unoccupied lands as cultivators, but the distress among the later arrivals was dreadful indeed. Numbers were dying of starvation and disease. The British therefore undertook large-scale relief measures. Food and materials for building huts were distributed, and Captain Hiram Cox, fresh from his experiences in Burma, was sent during the wet monsoon of 1799 to superintend the work. He settled about 10,000 of them

<sup>1</sup>He had the title of 'myothugyi' or district governor.

in the neighbourhood of the Bagholi River, the chief settlement being named after him, Cox's Bazar.)

Once more a Burmese force chasing the refugees violated British territory. It repulsed a military police detachment sent to intercept it, but retired across the frontier shortly afterwards. Shore had now been superseded by a very different type of man as Governor-General, Lord Wellesley. But at the moment when all this happened he was unable to take the firm line he would have preferred. He had to deal with Mysore, and in the north-west an Afghan invasion threatened. For the present, therefore, he had to content himself with sending Captain Hill to the Burmese Viceroy of Arakan to explain the principles of international law affecting frontier questions.

Hill informed the Viceroy that there was a real distinction between peaceful immigrants and dacoits. The Government would surrender the latter if definite proof of their guilt were produced. He was walking on thin ice, as he himself realized during his journey through northern Arakan. Many of the refugees, owing to their desperate plight, had taken to dacoity and were ravaging far and wide in Arakan. He soon found his task hopeless and returned to Calcutta accompanied by a Burmese ambassador, who presented a summary demand for the surrender of all the fugitives. Wellesley replied that "motives of humanity" prevented him from taking such a step, but promised that he would restrain the Arakanese from raiding Burmese territory. Moreover, in May 1800 he issued a proclamation forbidding further immigration into British territory. It was, of course, quite impossible in practice to carry out the Burmese demand. It was equally impossible both to restrain the fugitives from raiding Burmese territory and to prevent further immigration into British territory. The innumerable creeks, the dense jungles and the malarial nature of the country, quite apart from any other considerations, presented insuperable obstacles to any effective frontier control. It was an unpleasant situation. And the Viceroy of Arakan made it still more so by sending a strongly-worded letter to Wellesley threatening war, if his demands were not complied with.

Mysore had by this time been disposed of in the bloody shambles of Seringapatam, but a new danger loomed ahead, this time from the Marathas. Once more Wellesley had to pocket his pride and swallow the insult. He adopted the view, therefore, that the Vice-

roy's communication could not have been authorized by the Court of Ava, and announced his decision to re-open relations with the King, in order to discover whether the "Council of State of Ava" was prepared to disavow the Viceroy's action. At the same time he ordered the frontier forces in Chittagong to be heavily reinforced.

In order to decide upon the exact line to be taken in this new approach to Ava, Wellesley called in Major William Francklin to study the voluminous papers in the Calcutta records relating to previous missions to Burma. Francklin was an orientalist whose special subject was Persia: he had no knowledge whatever of Burma. Mainly from Captain Hiram Cox's papers he compiled a valuable memorandum, later published in London.<sup>1</sup> But he made the astounding suggestion, accepted by Wellesley, that an attempt should be made to negotiate a subsidiary alliance treaty with Ava. Both completely failed to realize that they were not dealing with an Indian native state, but with an imperialist power bent on expansion. The precise situation which, it was supposed, offered the British an opportunity to interfere in Burmese affairs in this manner, so successfully exploited by Wellesley in India, was that in the event of Bodawpaya's death or abdication, one of his younger sons, the Toungoo Min, was known to be planning to seize the throne from the Heir Apparent, the Ein She Min. Wellesley believed that some such crisis as this would shortly arise and hoped to intervene in support of the rightful succession by sending troops from Chittagong. Those troops—he estimated the initial expeditionary force at two companies of European infantry, one battalion of native infantry and two six pounders with their gun crews—were to be the thin end of the wedge. The hope then was that the Government of Ava would consent to subsidize a permanent British force, thereby enabling British influence to become firmly established.

These ideas were elaborated with minute detail in a document dated 26 April 1802, and drawn up for the instruction of Symes, now a Colonel and just back from furlough in England, who was chosen for this strangely inappropriate task. He was told that Wellesley had good reason to believe that the King was about to abdicate, and that it was likely that under the circumstances both rival princes, the Ein She Min and the Toungoo Min, would solicit British assistance. But in case they did not, he was authorized

<sup>1</sup>Major William Francklin: *Tracts, Political, Geographical and Commercial, on the Dominions of Ava and the North Western Parts of Hindostan* (London, 1811).

to offer it to the Ein She Min, should the state of affairs be such as to induce him to expect that the offer would be accepted.

Seldom can a diplomatic mission have been despatched with instructions so ludicrously irrelevant. Bodawpaya was one of the strongest kings in Burmese history, and there would appear to be no record of his ever having contemplated abdication. It is, however, significant that when he died, in 1819, his successor, Bagyidaw,<sup>1</sup> immediately executed the Toungoo Min and all his family. As Lord of the White Elephant he considered himself sufficiently slighted by being addressed by a mere viceroy, the "Bangalamyosa" (eater of the province of Bengal), as Wellesley was contemptuously styled at Ava. And as for the suggestion that the British might send military aid—luckily Symes was too discreet ever to make it—the King, years later, said to Captain Canning that it was a pity the English had not realized that he could not consider alliance with a mere viceroy, otherwise he could have come to their assistance, against the French, whom he could easily have conquered for them.

Symes was provided with a magnificent escort of sepoys and servants amounting in all to nearly 230 men. It was hoped in this way to impress the Burmese with the might and majesty of the British raj. The effect was the very opposite. Even greater efforts were made to humiliate the envoy than in Cox's case. He was left waiting for an audience for three months on an island off the capital, where corpses were burnt and criminals executed. Symes never published the record of his second visit to Ava. His journal occupies no less than 262 pages of the Bengal Secret and Political Consultations for the year 1804, and its appendices another 64 pages. Its tone is that of complete disillusionment and frustration. "My situation is now become extremely arduous," he wrote, when the true state of affairs dawned upon him. "I have to combat the prejudice of a proud and half-mad bigot, who, though not ignorant of, yet little regards the laws of nations. I have to appease resentment sedulously fomented by the low artifices of wicked men, and to oppose the intrigues of rivals, who dexterously improve every opportunity that offers. To convey reason to the ear of such a despot is almost impossible; no man dare tell him a disagreeable truth. He has avowed his partiality for the French, and animosity to the English, and every voice in his Court re-echoes his sentiments."

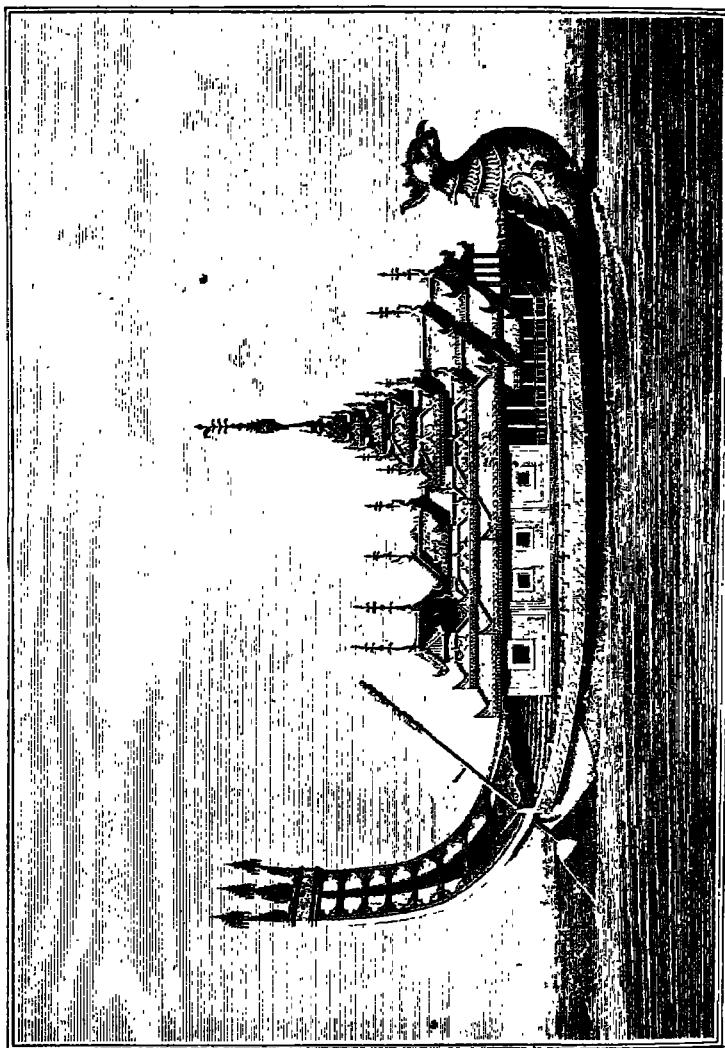
<sup>1</sup>Son of the Ein She Min, who died in 1808.

Once more the story of the McCartney mission to Chiha provided the Burmese with an excellent text-book for its treatment of an English mission. Once more a bogus embassy, this time a French one, headed by an American who had escaped from Calcutta gaol, was dressed up and given precedence to the English. The objects of Symes's mission were contemptuously ignored, and he had to be content with a mere verbal disavowal of the Viceroy of Arakan's action made to him by the King's ministers. Throughout all this trying time Symes bore himself with almost incredible restraint, patience and dignity. "If I show that I feel the insult beyond reparation they will know it to be so," he wrote. "Temperance and time are my best weapons; signs of dejection will only encourage indignity and passionate menace may provoke outrage." He left solemnly warning the ministers that war might ensue. He returned to Calcutta a sadder and wiser man, able at last to give a true picture of the King's attitude: "It seems he will treat with no power on earth as an equal, but he graciously receives under his protection China, Ceylon, Assam and the British Empire in India. He will grant a boon but will not make a treaty; and whatever he gives, it must be in the form of a mandate, issued in favour of a suppliant."

The unhappy mission was not without its good results. Symes was able to report that his long intercourse with the King's ministers had had the effect of preventing a positive alliance with the French at Mauritius, and that there was little to be feared from French intrigues in Burma. The King's partiality for the French, he wrote, "arises from a persuasion that he has nothing to apprehend from their power, and he encourages them to come to his country, not with any intention of treating Frenchmen better than Englishmen . . . but to use them as a counterpoise against the English." His ministers, however, had largely dispelled that illusion. Moreover, Symes felt that he had succeeded in instilling into the King's mind a juster appreciation of the British attitude: "His Majesty was angry, but is now in good humour; he was offended, and now forgives."

Again the situation in India saved the Governor-General from having seriously to consider the feasibility of a resort to force. Hence, still another envoy was sent, Captain Canning, a man of wisdom and diplomacy, to give the Burmese a chance of apologising. He got no further than Rangoon. There a violently anti-British





THE ROYAL BARRACUE

Governor, who had already had an unpleasant fracas with Symes, soon rendered his position untenable, and once more diplomatic relations were severed. The stronger forces stationed by Wellesley on the Arakan frontier proved a useful deterrent to the raids that had disturbed that region for so long, and for some years peace prevailed there. It is interesting to note that they consisted of the two companies of European infantry, the battalion of native infantry and the detachment of artillery with two six-pounder guns, which the Governor-General had originally intended for a very different task.

In 1807 the first Lord Minto became Governor-General of India and at once set himself to eliminate French influence from the East. The story of the French threat to British power in India during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars is an interesting one, and, through its connexion with Mauritius Burma comes often into the picture. This island was a centre from which privateers in large numbers operated against English shipping, causing severe losses. There were also two other centres from which the French threat emanated, the Dutch colonial empire and Persia. In the early stages of the war the British seized the Cape, Ceylon, and some of the East Indian spice islands. The French, however, controlled Java. In 1807 Napoleon entered into relations with Persia and a French agent at Teheran began to investigate overland routes to India.

Minto began with the threat from Persia. To counteract it he made a treaty with the great Sikh leader, Ranjit Singh. Then he turned to the French islands. In 1809 they were blockaded; in the following year they were captured. As soon as the blockade began Minto decided that relations with Burma must be re-opened. It was believed in Calcutta that there was an extensive trade between Mauritius and Burmese ports, and that as the blockade would interfere with this, the King might take reprisals on British merchants. Hence in 1809 Captain Canning was sent on his second mission to Rangoon to explain the nature of the British operations and assure the Burmese authorities that no acts of hostility were intended against them. This was actually Canning's third visit to Burma: he had accompanied Symes on his second mission in 1802. He was not an envoy deputed to the Court, but merely an official "agent" instructed to take up residence at Rangoon.

His reception was far better than he had anticipated. The anti-

British governor, who had given so much trouble to Symes in 1802, and to Canning himself in 1803, was still in charge, but behaved with surprising mildness. When Canning explained the nature of his mission to the members of the city council,<sup>1</sup> they expressed surprise that the blockade of the French islands could be thought to have any bad effects upon Burmese trade. He soon discovered that the Government of India had greatly overestimated the amount of trade between Burma and the islands: for some years it had been practically non-existent. Moreover, there was no alarm whatever among the English traders in Rangoon on the score of possible Burmese reprisals resulting from the blockade. In fact there was no need for his mission to have been sent at all.

He confirmed all that Symes had said six years earlier regarding the extent of the French connexion with Burma. Since he himself had left Rangoon in November 1803, he said, no official communications had taken place between Ava and Mauritius. He was sure that the government would never willingly admit a French force. He made other points, curiously prophetic, as it turned out. The French were well aware of the importance of Burma, he said, and after the restoration of peace might be expected to turn their attention to the exploitation of the country. "What is chiefly to be feared from French influence in the Burmah dominions is the introduction of artificers and officers of that nation for the purpose of bringing into activity the numerous resources of the country, and forming and disciplining of Burmah troops." The artificers were certainly there in the eighteen-eighties, even if the officers were not. Thibaw's chief military assistants were Italians.

Canning was invited, and went, to the capital. On the way he noted the appalling depopulation and poverty of the countryside, due to the constant requisitions of man-power and supplies for the unsuccessful expeditions against Siam which had gone on throughout most of Bodawpaya's reign. "The misery of the people is beyond description," he wrote. In the 16th century the great kingdom of Tabin Shwehti and Braginoco had fatally weakened itself in this way. Now that of Alaungpaya was following suit. The picture Canning gives of the state of the country, as compared with what he had seen when he first visited it in 1802, is important. It helps to explain the subsequent weakness of Burma. The extravagance of her foreign policy ruined her.

<sup>1</sup>The Yondaw, usually rendered 'Rounday' by the English.

## THE ARAKAN FRONTIER QUESTION

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At the capital Canning spent an interesting time. The new Heir Apparent told him naively that his grandfather was "strongly bent" on annexing Chittagong and Dacca, and that his private apartment was filled with maps and plans of those two districts. He promised, however, to oppose the project. Canning was most cordially received by the King in person. "a robust old man with harsh features, his dress quite plain." He laughed and joked with everyone around him—to their evident surprise. He said he rejoiced at the long friendship between his country and England, but he was not satisfied with having to deal with a Governor-General holding only a delegated authority; he thought himself entitled to an embassy from the King of England. Canning promised to convey these sentiments to the proper quarter. He was then taken on a round of sight-seeing, to the unfinished Mingun pagoda, the great image of the Buddha once in Arakan, the Royal Palace and the new White Elephant recently caught, and believed to be an omen of victory over Siam. On the day before he left, the whole city of Amarapoora outside the royal palace was destroyed by fire.

Canning returned to Calcutta with two very strong impressions upon his mind. One was the weak condition of Burma. The other was that the Court of Ava failed to realize the strength of Great Britain and really did dream of invading Chittagong and Dacca. He suggested to Lord Minto that the British should occupy Arakan as a precautionary measure.





## *Chapter XI*

### THE ARAKAN FRONTIER QUESTION

#### (b) "KINGBERING."

THE PROMISE OF BETTER RELATIONS BETWEEN CALCUTTA AND AVA was short-lived.\* For nearly ten years there had been comparative peace on the Arakan frontier. Suddenly in 1811 trouble on a bigger scale than ever before flared up in that insalubrious neighbourhood. The myothugyi, Nga Than De, who had escaped to Chittagong in 1798 and settled at Harbang, had long since died. His son and heir was named Chin Pyan, pronounced by the Arakanese Chin Bran and hence Anglicised in the form of King-bering or King-buring. Nga Than De, his father, had left behind some landed property not far from the eastern bank of the River Naaf, when he fled the country. It was not far from Maungdaw<sup>1</sup> and had acquired the name of Myothugyi from its former owner's title. It had been occupied by the Burmese police officer stationed at Maungdaw. -

Early in 1811 King-bering with a large force, armed with spears, guns and cannon, seized boats, crossed the Naaf and occupied the land. The Viceroy of Arakan at once complained to the British authorities at Calcutta, and Mr. P. W. Pechell, the Magistrate of Chittagong, was instructed to investigate the affair. At first he was completely in the dark as to where the disputed land lay. He thought that it was inside British territory. As a precaution, however, he ordered that King-bering should be removed away from the frontier. Before this order could be carried out King-bering, evading arrest, invaded Arakan with a force of between two and three thousand men, seized Maungdaw, and called upon all his compatriots in Chittagong to follow him. Soon he had a considerable army under him and, as the Burmese holding force in Arakan was weak, by the middle of June he had overrun the whole province except Mrauk-u, the capital. After a short siege the capital surrendered and a terrible vengeance was wreaked upon all who had

<sup>1</sup>The scene of British operations against the Japanese in the early months of 1943.

opposed him. The British magistrate at Chittagong was powerless to prevent the Arakanese settlers there from going over in large numbers to the rebel chieftain.

Wellesley's strong frontier force had long since been withdrawn. Both the British and the Burmese were completely taken by surprise. There were sinister rumours that the Company had given King-bering active support, and it was said that this incursion was in reality a British move to forestall a possible Burmese attempt to take Chittagong and Dacca. Actually King-bering had sent frantic appeals to the British to afford him recognition, and had offered to hold Arakan under British suzerainty. These, however, had been flatly refused.

Hence, in September 1811, Captain Canning was sent upon his third mission to Burma to assure the Court of Ava that everything possible had been done to stop the invasion, and that the British had in no way instigated it.

Canning found the Burmese government extremely sceptical regarding his protestations that his own government had no responsibility for the invasion. It was pointed out that King-bering must have been engaged on his plans for a considerable period, and that when the first incident over the Myothugyi land occurred, the Chittagong magistrate had acted with incredible sloth, since the big invasion had not begun until four months later, and during that interval King-bering had been recruiting men and completing his preparations under the very noses of the British.

The Burmese also accused a certain Dr. McRae of active assistance to the rebels, and demanded his surrender. This man was Civil Surgeon at Chittagong; he was also a private shipbuilder and superintended the Arakanese colony at Wangee. From his dock-yard, it was asserted, a party of rebels had, without interference, taken away some seventeen pieces of artillery. They had also had help in other forms from him. It was well known that McRae had been on friendly terms with King-bering for many years. In passing it may be mentioned that McRae denied these charges to the Government of India, though he admitted that he had known King-bering since 1800. His denial was accepted by the Government, but the Burmese refused to believe it and continued to demand his surrender.

There was also another incident which confirmed the suspicions of the Burmese that the British authorities knew what was afoot.

A heavy piece of cannon had been purloined from a disused battery at the entrance of the Chittagong river. The officer commanding at Chittagong had intercepted the thieves and retrieved the gun. As a result the guards at the Chittagong arsenal had been strengthened. The evidence of gross negligence, to say the least of it, certainly looks black against the Chittagong authorities. That was certainly how it appeared, not only to the Burmese, but also to a disgruntled English officer, Captain White, who years later published an account of the whole proceedings.<sup>1</sup> But, as Professor Pearn points out in his article on King-bering in the *Journal of the Burma Research Society*,<sup>2</sup> "in effect, southern Chittagong was unadministered territory over which the Company had not the means to secure control and the people of which were left very much to themselves." After ten years of peace on the frontier they were caught napping. Canning's position was rendered all the more difficult because the Burmese confronted him with Lord Wellesley's promise to restrain the Arakanese from incursions across the Naaf. With great tact and patience he managed to persuade them that the British had given the rebels no assistance. In accordance with his instructions he promised that if the rebels were defeated, steps would be taken to prevent them from returning to Chittagong, and if any of them managed to get through, they should be expelled. In December 1811 a large Burmese flotilla set out from Rangoon to deal with the rebels. It joined up with another from Bassein and proceeded to Sandoway, where it took on board a large force of soldiers. Then it sailed north in search of the rebel fleet. Near the island of Cheduba two big fights took place. King-bering's forces were routed. He himself and a large number of his followers escaped and fled to the mountains. Notwithstanding Canning's assurances to the Burmese government, all attempts to prevent them from re-entering British territory failed, and once more it was found to be impossible to expel them.

At this juncture Calcutta announced a change of policy which sorely displeased the Burmese. It decided not to hand over King-bering and his officers, but to take them into custody and transport them to some other part of Bengal. The viceroy of Arakan replied by demanding their surrender and also that of Dr. McRae. Parties of Burmese soldiers pursuing the fugitive chiefs were encountered

<sup>1</sup>Capt. W. White: *A Political History of the Extraordinary Events which led to the Burmese War* (London, 1827).

<sup>2</sup>Vol. XXIII, Part II. 1933, p. 65.

inside British territory and the Viceroy threatened that he would invade Chittagong with 80,000 men, if his demands were not complied with. Actually he had a force of less than one-tenth of that number under his command, but the British frontier forces only amounted to 440 men all told. Reinforcements therefore were hurried to the threatened district and efforts to apprehend King-bering were redoubled. In February 1812 a detachment of sepoys captured his family, but he himself managed to elude his pursuers. This partial success caused the British authorities much soul-searching. They well knew the grim fate awaiting anyone handed over to the Burmese; on the other hand a refusal to do so would only serve to make a bad situation worse. They therefore temporised by renting a house for King-bering's wife and family and keeping them under house-arrest. At the same time the fervent hope was expressed that he himself would not further embarrass them by falling into their clutches. And it may well have been that the search parties took the broad hints that were let drop.

Meanwhile relations with the Burmese had deteriorated so much that it was feared that Captain Canning and the Europeans resident at Rangoon might be seized as hostages. Moreover, parties of Burmese troops were constantly crossing the frontier and searching the uninhabited jungle tracks for the fugitive leader; and one party had actually built a stockade at Ratnapalong. Hence ships were sent to Rangoon to evacuate Europeans, if necessary, and the reinforced frontier forces prepared to attack the Burmese forces on the other side of the Naaf, from which the raiding parties were being sent out. The rains, however, broke and put an end to this state of affairs. The Burmese force withdrew to Mrauk-u, the Company's to Ramu, and the frontier was left unguarded.

Once more King-bering collected his forces for a descent upon Arakan. A desperate man leading desperate men, he was ready to brave the worst rigours of that season of terrific storms and floods. He even occupied one of the frontier stations from which the Company's troops had just been withdrawn, living himself in the officers' mess. His first attempt to attack by sea along the coast was wrecked by a monsoon storm. Nothing daunted he led a land force of several thousand men across the frontier and occupied Maungdaw. Again he was unsuccessful. Mr. Pechell sent a timely warning to the Burmese commander, who thereupon met the invaders and routed them with great slaughter.

Again the Arakanese refugees came pouring over the British frontier. Many of them were arrested by the Company's forces, and huge rewards were offered for the capture of the leaders. But again most of them, with the connivance of the local population, got through, and King-bering remained at large. Again also the Burmese demanded the surrender of the refugees, only to be met with a curt refusal on the part of the British. As luck would have it, however, the Company's frontier force was in such a bad way on account of sickness that most of it had to be withdrawn. Hence King-bering and his starving men in the hills were able to plunder the countryside without let or hindrance. On one occasion the doughty chieftain threatened Cox's Bazar itself and blockaded the small force still stationed at Ramu. For some weeks the southern parts of Chittagong were entirely in his hands, and Mr. Pechell was at his wits' end as to what to do.

With the cessation of the rains in November 1812 greater freedom of movement became possible. King-bering seized Cox's Bazar and even attempted a raid on Harbang. This, however, was repulsed by a party of sepoys, and the Company's forces began to take concerted measures against the rebels. When a small force under Lieut. Young appeared before Cox's Bazar, the rebels to the number of over a thousand hurriedly evacuated the place, taking to the hills. They left behind 150 war boats, which were being prepared for a fresh expedition, a large store of rice, some muskets and guns. The rebels had a wholesome respect for trained troops. Chin Byan was now seriously hampered in attempting another large-scale raid into Arakan; nevertheless he crossed the frontier and built a stockade at Mingalayi not far from Maungdaw, and was soon threatening another march on Mrauk-u. This time he was more easily turned back and his stockade burnt. But again he escaped, though with only 150 followers; so the old game began afresh. Burmese forces crossed the frontier searching for him. They attacked two villages in the Chittagong area before retiring to their own territory. Then the Viceroy of Arakan appeared on the scene and talks began. He explained to the Company's officers at the frontier that the incursion was unauthorized and that its leader had been put in irons. But he speedily released the officer and wrote to Mr. Pechell that the outrage had not been committed by Burmese troops at all, but by King-bering's men. This proved to be the last Burmese violation of the frontier for some time. Apparently the capture of

Cox's Bazar had pleased the Government of Ava, which was satisfied that at last the British meant business. A new Burmese Viceroy took over at this stage, and although he repeated the old demand for the surrender of the rebel leaders, he kept a firmer hold over his own troops.

For the remainder of the dry season and throughout the rains of 1813 King-bering's activities continued with depressing regularity. Now, however, he confined his unwelcome attentions to British territory, and Mr. Pechell, the sorely-tried Magistrate of Chittagong, could think of no other way of dealing with the now chronic problem than by the suggestion, sternly rejected by Calcutta, that Burmese troops should be invited to co-operate with the Company's forces in chasing down the dacoit leaders. During the rains the indefatigable rebel leader became bolder, carrying off his two infant daughters from Harbang and sending out messages for the Arakanese refugees to join him in another invasion of their native land. He addressed another letter to the English authorities offering to become the Company's vassal in return for support, this time threatening vengeance if he were opposed. At the end of the rains the whole of southern Chittagong was again in confusion and the Company's troops appeared to be helpless in face of the many dacoities which occurred.

Early in 1814 therefore the Governor-General came to the conclusion that only by co-operation with the Burmese, as suggested by Pechell, could the rebel leaders be successfully hunted down. Pechell was accordingly instructed to suggest to the Viceroy that Burmese troops should search the hills and jungles, while the Company's forces operated in the open country. It was felt that in that way there would be no danger of the Burmese plundering inhabited localities. While Pechell and the Viceroy were engaged in haggling over the exact terms of co-operation, King-bering again occupied Maungdaw. But the Burmese drove him out and he fled back to his hill stockade in the wild jungles of Chittagong. English military opinion on the spot was against any attempt to follow him up as being far too difficult an operation; and the plan for co-operation with the Burmese was completely frustrated by a serious recurrence of raiding on their part. Moreover, the Viceroy cunningly insisted that if Burmese troops were to assist the Company the latter must supply them with arms and ammunition. So the triangular contest continued right through the year 1814,

with the rebels once more overawing the whole southern part of Chittagong when the rains drove the Company's forces to shelter. But there was a difference this time. King-bering's influence was no longer what it had been. Defeat after defeat had at last brought dissension among his followers. A rival leader, Raingmin, arose, whom the English, after defeating, tried to enlist against his old chief. But the two leaders effected a reconciliation. Nevertheless, the old chief himself became strangely quiescent. While his raiding parties scoured the country round Harbang and Chakaria, he remained behind his jungle stockade.

The desultory discussions with the Viceroy of Arakan on the subject of Anglo-Burmese co-operation against the rebel leaders went on month after month. Sometimes the tone was friendly; then suddenly the Viceroy would accuse Mr. Pechell of trifling with him and of taking bribes from King-bering. Then out would come the usual threats to invade Chittagong with an incredible number of men and carry off every Arakanese settled in the land. Once he even arrested Mr. Pechell's messenger and locked him up for three weeks. In October Miza, one of King-bering's principal lieutenants, on whose head a reward of Rs. 1000 - had been placed, was captured. Next the chieftain's own headquarters were taken, but the bird had flown. This, however, was the end. When late in the year the dry season returned, everything was strangely quiet. Not until late in January 1815 did the reason become apparent: King-bering was dying. He died on 25th January and his funeral rites were performed three days later. The whole movement, of which he had been the directing force, soon petered out. The other leaders were either captured or surrendered; the rank and file settled down to peaceful occupations.

✓ It is easy to form an erroneous impression of what took place, if one concentrates one's attention on this story of apparent weakness and ineptitude on the part of the English authorities. Unfortunately, the Burmese had no sense of perspective. They saw only the weakness; and the Company's invitation to them to co-operate in dealing with the rebels led them fatally to underestimate its real power. Great Britain herself was in the throes of the last great struggles with Napoleon. The Indian Government had its attention concentrated first on French power in Java, then upon the Gurkhas and the Pindaris. Throughout this period also it was keeping a wary eye upon the Marathas, with whom it was evident that a final reckoning

was soon bound to come. It could not spare the attention of the troops to deal effectively with the Arakan frontier problem. The task of fighting in the unmapped and unhealthy jungles of southern Chittagong against an enemy, who was a past master in the art of elusion, and of operating amongst a population speaking an unintelligible language, was easily beyond the powers of such forces as the Company's officers on the spot could command. Only a specially trained and equipped force, as recent experience in dealing with the Japanese has proved, could have coped successfully with the situation. This was beyond the scope of Calcutta's imagination. The upshot of it all was that irreparable harm had been done to Anglo-Burmese relations. The Burmese were deeply offended. They had learnt to distrust the Company and to feel no respect for its much vaunted power. Herein lay the chief cause of the first Anglo-Burmese war. •

## CHAPTER XII

### THE FIRST BURMESE WAR

THE SUBJECT OF THE PRESENT CHAPTER HAS BEEN SO THOROUGHLY dealt with by historical writers whose works are easily accessible, that detailed treatment of it here is quite unnecessary. Not only are there excellent published collections of documents covering the war and its causes,<sup>1</sup> but also no less than five officers, Doveton, Havelock, Robertson, Snodgrass and Trant, who fought in the war, wrote entertaining books about it, with much local colour. Burma then was as much a mystery land to Europeans as Tibet was rather more than a generation ago; hence presumably the spate of books about it produced during the period. There are, moreover, thrilling accounts of what life was like for Europeans who were unlucky enough to be caught by the war on the Burmese side of the fighting fronts, in the intrepid Mrs. Judson's letters<sup>2</sup> and in Henry Gouger's *Personal Narrative of Two Years' Imprisonment in Burmah*.<sup>3</sup>

(After Captain Canning's third mission to Burma in 1811-12 no further English envoys were sent. Communications were carried on by correspondence. Both sides remained intensely suspicious of the intentions of the other. The rumour-monger too was busy; for years Chittagong buzzed with constant rumours of Burmese preparations for war.) Again and again letters came from Ava or Mrauk-u demanding the extradition of the Arakanese settlers in Chittagong, and asserting Burmese claims to Chittagong, Dacca, Moorshedabad and Kasimbazar, as being former appanages of the Arakan kingdom. One of these missives even went so far as to order the British to hand over the revenues of those districts to Ava, with the threat that if the demand were not complied with, "we will destroy your country." Calcutta, however, invariably went on hoping that an amicable settlement could be reached. The Company could not

<sup>1</sup>H. H. Wilson: *Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War. Papers relating to the First Burmese War* (presented to Parliament, 1825). *Papers relating to East Indian Affairs*, printed by order of the House of Commons, 1825 (covering the period 1812-1824).

<sup>2</sup>J. D. Knowles: *Memoir of Mrs. Ann H. Judson* (1829). Mrs. Judson: *Account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire* (London, 1823).

<sup>3</sup>London, 1860.

bring itself to believe that the Court of Ava was so completely ignorant of British military and naval strength that it would really go to the length of war. And until the Maratha danger was finally dealt with it was extremely anxious to avoid war on its Eastern frontier. Hence, local officers were consistently admonished to adopt a conciliatory attitude. Possibly it was the right policy while Bodawpaya lived. But he died in 1819, and his successor Bagyidaw had nothing like his grandfather's control over the warlike propensities of his ministers, especially the handsome dashing Maha Bandula, who became a popular idol through his exploits in Assam early in the new reign.

Throughout the period leading up to the war the Burmese were busy intriguing with Indian princes, with the object of making a combined attack upon the British. Missions composed of officials and Brahmins often passed through British territory bound for such places as Benares, Lahore and even Delhi, with the ostensible purpose of collecting sacred books for the Court of Ava. On one occasion when the Shabunder of Arakan presented himself at Chittagong with the request that he be allowed to proceed to Delhi for this purpose, the British authorities commented that it was a strange place for a Buddhist to go to for sacred books. Strict watch was kept on all these activities, and when Burmese agents were discovered communicating with Maratha chieftains, they were stopped and sent home. The Bengal Political Consultations contain some amusing stories of these activities, as, for instance, when in 1816 Burmese agents returned from Benares taking with them some Indian girls who were to be palmed off on the King as the daughters of a great Raja.

It was in Assam that the really decisive steps leading to war were taken. From the seventeenth century the Ahom monarchy, founded there four centuries earlier, had been sinking into decline. In the second half of the eighteenth century things went from bad to worse in that unhappy country. In the reign of Lakshmi Singh (1769-80) a religious sect, known as the Moamarias, who denied the supremacy of the Brahmins, was goaded by fiendish persecution into a state of chronic rebellion, which brought ruin to the country and its dynasty. His successor, Gaurinath Singh (1780-94), was a debauched and imbecile tyrant, who in addition to the Moamaria trouble had to face constantly rebellious vassals. Such was the chaos, that some of his ministers begged the British to intervene.

and restore order. Lord Cornwallis in 1792 sent Captain Welsh with a small force of sepoys to deal with the situation. But when he reported that far more troops would be required and that nothing short of complete annexation would work in practice, it was decided that the policy of limited interference was useless, and he was withdrawn.

From this time onwards the condition of Assam became truly terrible. The Moamarias carried on wholesale destruction, mercenaries recruited in Bengal committed every kind of outrage, and marauding dacoit bands roamed at will. In 1814 Chandrakanta Singh, a boy of 14, came to the throne. What real power there was rested in the hands of the Burha Gohain, Purananda. His rival, the Bar Phukan, fled to Calcutta asking for British assistance, and when this was refused, a Burmese agent there suggested to him that he should get in touch with King Bodawpaya. The result was that in March 1817 a Burmese army marched to the capital, Jorhat, and having placed its nominee in power, withdrew. The new government, however, was immediately overthrown, together with the Raja himself. In 1819 the Burmese returned, reinstated Chandrakanta and treated his country to a dreadful dose of atrocities, before withdrawing a second time. Again Chandrakanta found his position hopeless. This time he fled to British territory, which he began to use as a base for staging a counter-attack. A third Burmese expedition resulted in the placing of a further nominee of theirs upon the throne under their immediate supervision. This time they had come to stay.

Meanwhile another Assamese pretender, Purandar Singh, had also been using British territory in order to collect troops and fight his way back. The British local officer at Rangpur, David Scott, strongly urged the Calcutta government to supply him with arms to enable him to drive out the Burmese, since the consolidation of their power in the country would, he prophesied, prove dangerous to the Company. His advice, however, was disregarded, and he was told that it was a principle of British rule not to permit armed bodies of troops to be assembled for invading a neighbouring state. Nevertheless, Purandar Singh, assisted by a country-born adventurer, Robert Bruce, did invade Assam in this manner. They were defeated and Bruce was captured, only to pass into the service of Chandrakanta. The British then allowed Chandrakanta, as legitimate ruler of Assam, to purchase arms and attempt to regain his

throne against the Burmese. In January 1822, he actually succeeded in occupying Gauhati, but was soon driven out by Maha Bandula, who was now the real ruler of Assam.

The situation on the Assam frontier had by this time become not unlike that of the period 1811-1815 on the Arakan frontier. Patriot leaders were using British territory in attempts to drive the Burmese out of their country. Burmese troops were chasing them out and following them across the British frontier. Scott's protests to the Burmese were being met with the same excuses as Pechell's had been in the previous period. Bandula, however, was a determined leader, who had no respect whatever for British power. In July, 1822, he sent an envoy to Calcutta to demand the surrender of Chandrakanta and other exiles. He was more successful than the Viceroy of Arakan had been in King-bering's case, for although Calcutta refused his demand, he succeeded in kidnapping the fugitive Raja. And while David Scott in alarm was writing to Calcutta for gunboats to patrol the Brahmaputra in order to defend Dacca from a possible attack by the Burmese, they in their turn seized a small island which was British territory in that river near Goalpara.

Assam and Chittagong were not the only regions on Burma's north-western frontier which felt the heavy hand of her expansionist policy. Manipur, to the south of Assam, and between the Brahmaputra and the Upper Chindwin, had once been a tributary state in the great days of Bayinnaung. Long famous for its ponies and its polo, its raiding parties had become the terror of Upper Burma in the first half of the eighteenth century. Alaungpaya had been forced to deal with this scourge, and had done so with characteristic ruthlessness. From his time onwards the Burmese had gone on raiding Manipur, carrying off thousands of people, until they had destroyed its civilization utterly and reduced the country to complete ruin. In 1813 they set up Marjit Singh on its throne and received in return the cession of the Kabaw valley. When he failed to appear at Bagyidaw's coronation in 1819, they treated his country to another dose of devastation, so that he and thousands of Manipuris fled to the neighbouring state of Cachar, just to the west and next door to the British territory of Sylhet. There they plundered the country so effectively that the Raja, Govinda Chandra, fled to Sylhet asking for British help.

The prospect of a Burmese occupation of Cachar stirred Calcutta

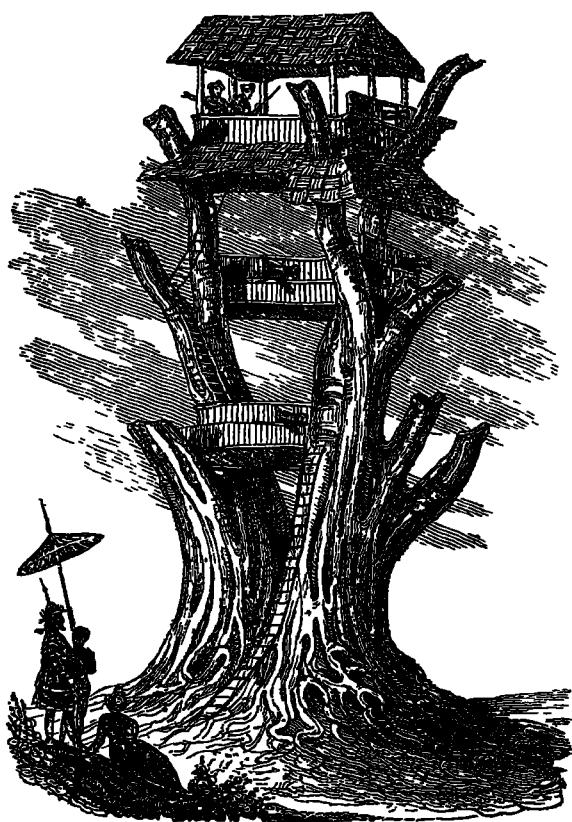
a ~~host~~ to definite action, especially when Governor-General Lord Amherst heard that Govinda Chandra was also appealing for help to the Burmese, and that a Burmese army was on its way from Assam to "re-instate" him. With the passes of Cachar in their hands an attack upon Eastern Bengal would be only too easy. Hence the Raja and his country were taken officially under British protection. The little hill state of Jaintia, just to the north of Cachar, was likewise threatened by the Burmese at the same time. It also therefore became a protected state under British suzerainty.

But the Burmese were undeterred by these new British moves. Late in 1823 David Scott reported that they were preparing to invade Cachar. He was told to inform them that it was under British protection. When in defiance of this warning they pursued their march into the country, a Company's force, under Major Newton, defeated one of their columns. But they were soon coming in in overwhelming numbers from both Assam and Manipur, and the British force had to fight a series of defensive engagements in the month of February 1824. Although they possessed greatly superior numbers, the Burmese evidently found this resistance more than they had bargained for, since they retreated into Manipur, and the British were left in occupation of Cachar.

Such was the state of affairs in the Assam region when in March, 1824, Lord Amherst formally declared war on Burma. For the events leading to that declaration, however, we must turn to the Chittagong region once more. Almost as soon as Bagyidaw came to the throne, serious trouble began to arise around the estuary of the Naaf. The Ramu region near Cox's Bazar had long been a great hunting ground for elephants, and the Company employed men there for this purpose. The Burmese began to seize these hunting parties and carry them off, on the pretext that they were trespassing on Burmese soil. They also began to fire on British subjects proceeding in boats up and down the river.

As a result of all this, the British frontier post at Tek Naaf was strengthened, and a few men were posted on the tiny island of Shahpuri, just off the mainland and well on the British side of the river mouth. In September, 1823, a Burmese force suddenly rushed this new post and took it. Calcutta at once sent a firm note to King Bagyidaw, calling upon him to disavow the act and punish the offenders. At the same time reinforcements of British and Indian troops were hurried to the frontier, and the island was re-occupied.





MAHA BANDULA'S LOOK-OUT TREE

though only for a short time, since it was found to be exceptionally unhealthy even for those regions.'

The Court of Ava completely misunderstood Lord Amherst's action in sending the letter: it was interpreted as a sign of weakness. But the Governor-General was equally mistaken in his belief that the Burmese were not seriously out to challenge British might. An attempt was even made to set up an Anglo-Burmese commission to define the boundary; but when the Burmese delegates arrived, their behaviour was so insolent that negotiations were broken off. One last attempt at conciliation shows how far the British were prepared to go in this direction. A Burmese commission, accompanied by a large armed force, arrived at the already-evacuated island of Shah-puri, set fire to a hut, the only sign of previous occupation they could find, and sent in a demand for a deputation of British officers to meet them at Mangdu on the opposite bank of the Naaf. Although everybody on the spot scented something decidedly fishy in the invitation, two naval officers, Chew and Royce, fell into the trap and went, after taking, as they thought, adequate steps against treachery. They were immediately seized and hurried off into the interior. The protests of the Magistrate at Chittagong were disregarded.

This calculated outrage caused something like a general panic in southern Chittagong. It convinced the Governor-General that the Burmese not only meant to have war, but were preparing to have it on their own terms. The truth was that since the accession of Bagyidaw the whole of Burmese policy had been shaped towards the one supreme end of driving the British out of Bengal. The real director of this policy was Maha Bandula, who, ever since taking command in Assam, had been inspiring all the frontier moves, from the Brahmaputra down to the Naaf, as a co-ordinated whole, directed towards the ultimate invasion of Bengal. In January, 1824, he assumed command in Arakan and began to concentrate troops for a march on Chittagong. This threat, together with the Burmese invasion of Cachar, led Lord Amherst to declare a formal state of war with Burma on 5th March, 1824.

So began the worst-managed war in British military history. Nothing, for instance, could have been worse managed than the timing of its start. The hot weather leading up to the wet monsoon was just beginning. It would have been far better to have taken all possible measures for the safety of Chittagong without declaring

war, and to have gone ahead quietly with preparations for a sea attack on Rangoon after the monsoon in case the Burmese threat to Bengal continued. This would have saved many lives, and might have shortened the war very considerably.

The main plan of campaign was excellent: to capture Rangoon with a sea-borne expedition and advance up the Irrawaddy to the capital, at the same time conducting subsidiary operations in other quarters. These were to consist of minor offensives to clear the Burmese out of Assam and Arakan, and naval operations for the occupation of the Tenasserim coast. But the beginning of the rains was selected on the advice of Captain Canning as the best time for an advance up the Irrawaddy; he even made the interesting suggestion that an expedition might be sent against Amarapoora through Manipur. Had Sir Archibald Campbell's expedition, which easily occupied Rangoon in May, 1824, been properly equipped with transport, it might still have been possible to get through to the capital before the rains rendered navigation impossible. But further unpardonable miscalculations had been made. It was assumed that the capture of Rangoon would alone cause Bagyidaw to sue for peace. Failing that, it was assumed that the Mons of the Delta region would be so well-disposed towards the invaders that the necessary transport would be provided on the spot for the expedition against the capital.

Both assumptions were entirely false, as was also a third, namely, that plentiful provisions could be obtained in the country itself. Hence, while the invading army was held up for six months at Rangoon throughout the long rainy season, dysentery and fever wrought horrible havoc. In the best climate in the world a diet of putrid salted meat together with biscuit, which had to be soaked in hot water to clear it of weevils, would be disastrous to most constitutions. No fresh vegetables or meat were obtainable, and the men, especially the Europeans, died like flies. Out of the original force of 11,000 men, including 5,000 Europeans, soon a few hundreds only were fit for operations; and around them the Burmese succeeded in establishing a most effective land blockade by means of well-made stockades erected at strategic points.

The Burmese armies were no match for trained British forces operating in open country, but they were adepts in jungle fighting. They were extremely mobile, and exhibited high skill in throwing up earthworks and stockades. The Burmese leaders played a waiting

game hoping ultimately so to weaken the British by methods of attrition that when adequate reinforcements had piled up, they could be overcome by sheer weight of numbers. The British retaliated by capturing one by one the stockades which menaced their position. At the same time, forces were detached for operations in the south, which resulted in the capture of the ports of Syriam, Martaban, Ye, Tavoy and Mergui; and from these places supplies of fresh food began to make their way in due course to the beleaguered army at Rangoon.)

The British seizure of Rangoon had come as a complete surprise to the Burmese. Their main force was under Bandula in Arakan with the invasion of Bengal as its objective. It had begun operations by crossing the Naaf, and routing a small detachment of Company's troops, which had very rashly attacked its camp at Ramu. The news had caused something like panic in Calcutta. But to everyone's surprise no attempt was made to exploit this success. The reason was that the news from Rangoon had caused the Burmese to pause. At first they hoped that the British could at least be pinned down to Rangoon, to allow their operations in the north to proceed. But the successes of the British against Burmese stockades, and the failures of two successive generals, the Thonba Wungyi and the Kyi Wungyi, to deal effectively with the invaders, caused a change of plan. Bandula was recalled from Arakan, loaded with honours, and directed south to drive the British into the sea. "In eight days," he said to the Prince of Tharrawaddy, "I shall dine in the public hall at Rangoon, and afterwards return thanks at the Shwe Dagon pagoda." He was now the most powerful man in the kingdom, so that poor distracted Mrs. Judson, whose husband was in the "death-prison" at Amarapoora, applied to him for his release. The wife of the great man told her that when he had driven the English out of Rangoon he would return and attend to her request.

Bandula marched on Rangoon with a force of 60,000 men and a considerable artillery train; he took up his position in an irregular semi-circle stretching from Kenimendine to the Pazundaung River with his front well protected by earthworks. The British effective force had been reduced by sickness to less than 4,000 men, 1,300 Europeans and 2,500 sepoys. Their key position was the commanding platform of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda where they had mounted twenty guns. They were, however, able to count on valuable support from the warships operating on the Rangoon river and the Pazun-

daung creek. Bandula's attack began on 1st December, and was directed mainly against the great pagoda and the British position at Kemmendine. It was decisively repulsed, but the British were too exhausted to follow up their success. The Burmese therefore were able to rally and to concentrate their forces at Kokine, near the beautiful site now occupied by the University of Rangoon. The British, however, took their position by storm a few days later, and almost at once the great army on which Burmese hopes had been centred was in a state of disintegration. Bandula with 7,000 picked troops retired ("escaped," says Mrs. Judson) to Danubyu. The rest of his army, save for a small force under Maha Thilawa, dispersed. Reinforcements were now rapidly arriving to Sir Archibald Campbell, and as quickly as possible a field force was organized with Prome as its objective. Bandula attempted to make a stand at Danubyu, but while directing operations there he was killed by a bomb on 1st April, 1825, and his whole army thereupon fled in disorder. The British went into cantonments at Prome for the rainy season, and active operations ceased for the time being.

Meanwhile other British forces had been campaigning on the northern fronts. One expedition attempted to carry out Captain Canning's plan of a march on Amarapoora through Cachar and Manipur. The Burmese were driven out of Cachar, but the mountainous country and terrific rains forced the British to abandon the attempt to follow them through Manipur; and the troops were withdrawn to Dacca. Later on, however, the difficult task was undertaken by Gumbheer Singh, the exiled Raja of Manipur, with native levies and one or two British officers. Operations were methodically carried out, and the Burmese were pushed or levered out of one strong point after another, until by February, 1826, no more of them were left in Manipur. Long before this other forces had cleared them out of Assam.

Bandula's recall from Arakan, and the long hold-up of Sir Archibald Campbell's army at Rangoon, tempted the Supreme Government at Calcutta to try out a push in Arakan, in the hope that it could be continued into Burma through one of the passes over the Arakan Yoma. Hence in January, 1825, small forces under General Morrison, consisting of a land column and a fleet, mainly of small craft, began a penetration into Arakan which soon brought them to Mrauk-u. The capital was easily taken from a defending force of about 9,000 Burmese. Then forces were detached, which proceeded

southwards to occupy Sandoway and Cheduba. The whole operation was completed by the end of April. The next step, however, was a proposition of quite a different order. No practicable route for the transport of an army into Burma could be discovered. The rains came on, and in Arakan they were found to be much heavier even than in the Delta region of Burma. The remainder of the story is one of appalling inefficiency and consequent decimation by disease. In the end the whole occupying force had to be withdrawn.

Bandula's death, and the British occupation of Prome, caused the utmost consternation at the Burmese capital. Feverish attempts were made to raise fresh levies of troops. Huge bounties were offered to recruits, contingents were raised by the Sawbwas of the Shan States under Burmese suzerainty, and even the scum of the streets rounded up for service. In order to gain time for these new preparations, an armistice was asked for, and in October the Kyi Wungyi met Sir Archibald Campbell at a little place twenty-five miles north of Prome for peace talks. The true nature of these was soon discovered, and with the Burmese preparing to attack Prome the war began once more.

The initial attempt to drive off the Burmese failed badly, but a few days later the main Burmese force was completely defeated, and the road lay open for an advance on the capital. The expeditionary force now possessed adequate river transport, including a steam-boat, the *Diana*, and rapid progress was accordingly made by both land and river forces. As the invaders neared the fortified post of Malun another peace delegation, headed by the Kyi Wungyi, reopened negotiations. When the British peace terms—the cession of Arakan, Tenasserim, Assam and Manipur, together with an indemnity of one crore of rupees<sup>1</sup>—were announced, the commissioners begged in the most abject terms for the deletion of the clauses relating to Arakan and the indemnity. "Our forests contain fine trees, you may cut them down," said one of them, "but we do not grow rupees." Finally, when all attempts to haggle broke down, the treaty was accepted and signed, and the commissioners departed to obtain the royal ratification. Fifteen days were allowed for this.

The time-limit expired, and the ratified treaty had not arrived from the capital. Instead, however, a new deputation appeared with a palpably false story to explain away the delay, and with further proposals for whittling down the unwelcome terms. The British

<sup>1</sup>At the then rate of exchange this was a million sterling.

commander-in-chief therefore announced that hostilities would immediately be resumed. After a sharp brush the Burmese were driven from their positions and the advance continued. In the captured Burmese headquarters the English and Burmese copies of the treaty were found. It was evident that the Court of Ava had refused ratification. It transpired afterwards that there were two parties at the Court, a peace party and a war party, and the latter had persuaded the weak-minded king against acceptance of the proposed terms. It was led by the chief queen, Nanmadaw Me Nu, a woman of low origin, who had once sold fish in the bazaar, and her brother, the real power behind the throne and a man of disgraceful character.

At the end of January, 1826, at Yenangyaung, famous even then for its petroleum wells, another deputation waited on Sir Archibald Campbell. It consisted of an American Baptist missionary, Dr. Price, and Assistant Surgeon Sandford, of the Royal Regiment, a prisoner of war on parole. They came to ask for a statement of the lowest terms that would be granted. The terms in the original treaty, without modification, were handed to them for transmission to the king, with the promise that the advance would not be pursued beyond Pagan if within twelve days a quarter of the indemnity were paid cash down.

Once more the Court of Ava hardened its heart. An adventurer, who took the title of "Lord of the Setting Sun," undertook to lead yet another army against the enemy. Near Pagan the last engagement of the war was fought. The "Retrievers of the King's Glory", as the new army had been dubbed, were easily cut to pieces, and the sorry leader on returning to Ava was ordered to immediate execution and tortured to death. A few days later Price and Sandford returned with the news that the king had accepted the terms, and would pay down a quarter of the indemnity by instalments if the British would halt their advance. This was refused and the army continued on its way to Yandabo, about 45 miles south of the capital. There it was met by Price with the full stipulated sum of twenty-five lakhs and the news that the Court accepted the terms of the treaty without reserve. He brought with him also all the Europeans who had been held prisoner at Ava. These included the American missionary, Adoniram Judson and his wife, Gouger, the British merchant who later published a graphic account of his adventures, and several others. On the 24th of February 1826 the treaty came officially

into force. The one disappointment of the army was that when only three days' march from Ava, the Golden City, as it believed, it had now to turn about and retrace its steps.)

By the Treaty of Yandabo the King of Burma ceded Arakan, Assam and Tenasserim to the East India Company. He promised in future to abstain from any interference in Manipur, Cachar and Jaintia, and to pay by instalments an indemnity of one crore of rupees. It was further stipulated that a British Resident should be admitted to Ava and a Burmese ambassador reside permanently at Calcutta. Commercial relations between the two powers were to be regulated by a separate treaty for which negotiations were to be set on foot at once. Thus Burma lost most of its sea frontage and the Indian North-Eastern Frontier was made secure. But the war had been won at the cost of exceptionally heavy casualties: out of 40,000 men who served in the expeditionary forces no less than 15,000 died, only 4 per cent of them being battle deaths. It had lasted nearly two years and cost thirteen millions sterling, a huge sum for a war against an Asiatic power in those days. Moreover, the administration at Calcutta had been discreditable in the extreme. Its failure to send proper supplies and adequate transport was lamentable, and might have led to very serious results, had it not been for the magnificent energy of Sir Thomas Munro at Madras in organizing supplies from that centre. Lord Amherst was severely criticised in England. He was a man of no imagination and very limited intelligence, faced by a situation which he frankly admitted was beyond his grasp.<sup>1</sup> But the war showed up also the extreme weakness of Burma after three quarters of a century of expansionist efforts, which had taxed her strength to the utmost. Her armies were badly led, her government utterly corrupt and inefficient. A small force properly equipped and handled could have brought the Court of Ava to its knees in a very few months.

The official Burmese account of the war is perhaps worth quoting here as a fitting conclusion to this chapter. "In the years 1186 and 1187<sup>2</sup> white strangers from the west fastened a quarrel upon the Lord of the Golden Palace. They landed at Rangoon, took that place and Prome, and were permitted to advance as far as Yandabo: for the King, from motives of piety and regard for life, made no preparations whatever to oppose them. The strangers had spent

<sup>1</sup>Burmese era.

vast sums of money in their enterprise, so that by the time they reached Yandabo their resources were exhausted, and they were in great distress. They then petitioned the King, who in his clemency and generosity sent them large sums of money to pay their expenses back, and ordered them out of the country." Surely even Dr. Goebbels could not improve upon that!

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE FIRST BRITISH RESIDENCY AT AVA

THE BURMESE HAD SUFFERED A CRIPPLING LOSS OF TERRITORY, AND an even worse blow to their national pride. Never before in all their history, since the fall of Pagan in the thirteenth century, had anything like it happened. Neither the dynasty nor the country as a whole ever recovered from the shock. King Bagyidaw soon became subject to recurring fits of melancholia, which ultimately led to insanity. The military power, which had been the pride of the early kings of the Alaungpaya dynasty, had been shattered once and for all. Never again did the Burmese attempt the conquest of Siam; never again did their armies range at will over Assam or Manipur. The Burma after 1826 was very different from the pre-war one. Then it had been, within its limits, powerful and the terror of its immediate neighbours. Now it was remote, shut-in, almost land-locked, and entirely self-absorbed. (15)

But in many ways it was the same Burma, so far as European visitors were concerned. There was the same arrogance in official circles, perhaps a little more of it to make up for the cruel loss of prestige the war had inflicted. There was the same elementary ignorance of the outside world, the same refusal to learn. No attempt was made to reform the governmental and economic methods which had contributed to the disaster. 'If there had been little sense of reality in the government's attitude towards the outside world before the war, there was still less after it.' The Treaty of Yandabo had stipulated that not only must a British Resident be entertained in Ava, but a Burmese Embassy also at Calcutta. The British authorities in India knew that this was essential, if peace was to be maintained, and they were just as anxious for peace as they had previously been to avoid war. But British Residents continued to be treated badly as they had been in the pre-war period, and no amount of persuasion on the part of the long-suffering Major Burney could prevail upon the stubborn Court to appoint a resident Ambassador to Calcutta, although he personally was liked and treated by the royal ministers as no Englishman had ever been before.

It was the old trouble: the Golden Feet would not demean themselves by appearing to treat a mere *Bangalamyosa* as an equal. The fog of illusion therefore settled all the more thickly around the tragic Court, which went on its traditional way, sublimely unconscious of the fact that a new world was arising to which it must either accommodate itself or perish.

There were many who thought that it was a pity that the British army had not occupied the capital and dictated its terms there. It is doubtful if this would have had the desired effect. The Court would have evacuated the place, and the British then ran the risk of having no one with whom any satisfactory terms could have been negotiated, since they were not prepared at this stage to take over the administration of the whole country. As soon as the treaty was ratified, Sir Archibald Campbell attended by Captain Lumsden and Captain Havelock visited Ava with a conciliatory message for the King. They were given a civil, though hurried, audience by Bagyidaw, whose one desire was to see the last of the invaders. Subsequent relations might have taken a better turn had Campbell at once appointed a Resident upon a proper footing, before the army retired from Yandabo to Rangoon. As it was, the first Resident did not make his way to the capital until the British army was back in Rangoon, awaiting the payment of the second instalment of the indemnity before evacuating. And by that time the Court was recovering from its worst fright, and was ready once again to use all the old arts of subterfuge, evasion and calculated insolence in order to salvage what little it could of its wrecked prestige.

The first Resident was John Crawfurd, who arrived from Singapore, where he had succeeded Sir Stamford Raffles as Governor. He was already a distinguished orientalist with a record of service in Java, Siam and the Malay States, and the admirable three-volume *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820), to his credit. His principal task was to negotiate the commercial agreement provided for at Yandabo. He was conveyed to Ava with an escort of European troops by the steamer *Diana* in September 1826. He was lodged outside the city, on the grounds that his European troops were causing a panic there.<sup>1</sup> The ministers then raised further difficulties. They asked him to order the evacuation of the British Army from Rangoon, although, as he pointed out, the second instalment of the

<sup>1</sup>His escort was less than that provided for in the Treaty.

indemnity was long overduo, and there were no signs of any intention to pay it.

His official presentation to the King was postponed because it rained on the day fixed for it. When he was at last summoned to the palace it was on an ordinary *kodaw* or "beg-pardon" day, when the king's vassals assembled to make customary offerings to him. Crawfurd's troops were not permitted to accompany him with arms, and hence were left behind on the steamer. Before he got in sight of the palace he was told to put down his umbrella as a mark of respect to it. Then he was made to dismount and walk along the whole eastern face of the palace enclosure before being permitted to enter. But by this time his forbearance was exhausted, and he refused to make the customary obeisance (*shikho*) to the palace or to take off his shoes when he entered the Council Chamber. When, after cooling his heels for two and a half hours, he was at last admitted to the Hall of Audience, his official presents to the King were the last to be received. When they were brought to the royal notice, an official read an address expressing the Governor-General's submission to the Golden Feet and his desire for forgiveness for past offences.)

For something like six weeks the ministers carried on what can only be described as highly intensive haggling, not only over the draft commercial treaty, which Crawfurd had brought with him, but also over the Yandabo treaty itself. They suggested that in return for the commercial concessions stipulated in his draft the British should restore the indemnity and the ceded territories. They then said they would agree to the draft, if payment of the next instalment of the indemnity could be postponed for three months. When Crawfurd consented to this, they went back on their promise, and said they would not sign the document until the whole British Army had left Rangoon. Little by little Crawfurd's original draft of twenty-two articles was whittled down to five only. These were:

1. Mutual freedom of trade for British merchants in Burma and Burmese merchants in India;
2. Free export of bullion from both countries;
3. Fixed port duties on ships according to their size;
4. Freedom of movement for merchants in the two countries, and permission to take away their families with them on leaving the country; and

5. Assistance and protection for shipwrecked vessels subject to suitable salvage.

At this stage the exasperated Resident fought hard and long against any further reductions. But he was defeated. The ministers insisted upon cutting out the clauses relating to bullion and the families of merchants. Hence the final treaty, which was signed on 24th November, 1826, contained only four clauses, of very doubtful value. Worse still, according to the Burmese view of international undertakings it was not a treaty at all, but an *ameindaw* or royal licence, which would automatically expire with the accession of a new king.

The haggling, however, was by no means over. The ministers brought up a whole list of matters arising out of the Yandabo treaty. The treaty was in fact very clumsily drawn up, especially where questions of frontier lines were concerned. It transpired that in several regions these were far more complicated than anyone had realized. The Burmese also exercised their powers of exegesis upon the treaty with highly imaginative, though somewhat transparent, ingenuity. They were inordinately anxious to find ways and means of scaling down the indemnity; and the question of the restoration of the ceded territories kept cropping up with embarrassing frequency. But Crawfurd had already endured more than he could stand, and he obviously did not know how to handle the Burmese. They were, and are, a difficult people to deal with, if approached with the usual British diplomatic correctness, and Crawfurd laboured under the grave disadvantage of knowing very little about them or the situation, with which he had to deal. Hence he was, in the words of Sir Henry Yule, "rendered weary, hopeless and disgusted by the arrogance and impracticability of the Burmese ministers." He told them that with the conclusion of the commercial convention his work was done: his instructions did not cover such political matters, arising from the treaty, as they were now raising. His only satisfaction was that, before he left Ava to return to Calcutta with the worthless treaty in his pocket, the second instalment of the indemnity was paid. The Calcutta authorities were of opinion that Crawfurd had too narrowly interpreted his instructions and should have made a better attempt to establish political relations on a proper footing before leaving the country. He was, of course, in a most difficult position, and was completely nonplussed. The

defects in the treaty had not been discovered until after the withdrawal of the army from its threatening position at Yandabo.<sup>1</sup>

Crawfurd's mission had been regarded as a try-out, to see if a useful purpose could be accomplished by a temporary Resident. As a result of his unhappy experiences he reported that it was inexpedient to appoint a permanent Resident. He thought that such an officer, no less than 1,200 miles distant by water from Calcutta, would be, as he expressed it, an object of perpetual jealousy to a government "indescribably ignorant and suspicious," and that his position would be "little better than honourable confinement". His suggestion was that relations with Ava should be in the hands of a political officer on the British side of the Salween frontier. He thought also that if the little port of Kyaikkami (renamed Amherst) were improved and developed, it would soon rival Rangoon; it was a strange error in simple economic geography for such a man to make, since it ought to have been obvious, even in those days, that the hinterland of Rangoon was incomparably better than that of Amherst. | For some time neither the Supreme Government at Calcutta nor the Directors at home could make up their minds as to the best policy to pursue.|| The Tenasserim establishment cost so much more than its revenues brought in, that the Directors even suggested to Calcutta the possibility of retroceding the province to Burma.

While these questions were agitating the official mind, events occurred which forced a decision in favour of establishing a permanent Resident. In the first place a Burmese mission appeared in Calcutta with the news that the Court of Ava was quite unable to pay the remaining instalments of the indemnity within the specified times, and asking for certain concessions regarding the Arakan and Manipur frontiers. When it was found, however, that the envoys were not invested with adequate power to settle the points at issue, they were referred to Sir Archibald Campbell, who was stationed at Moulmein as Chief Commissioner. The Supreme Government was, to say the least of it, surprised and disappointed, at receiving an embassy of such a nature. It had hoped for a resident envoy who could really speak for his government. It still failed to realize the sort of government with which it was dealing, one whose envoys were bound hand and foot to its views and whose heads would be the inexorable price of the slightest deviation from such views. The utmost concession that their tears and entreaties could win from Campbell was a grudgingly accorded consent to a slightly extended

spread over in the payments of the remainder of the indemnity. Campbell disbelieved the whole story of inability to pay. He guessed that the real hope of the Burmese was by one subterfuge or another to escape any further payments. As it turned out, however, the fear that the British might reoccupy Rangoon, if the payments were discontinued, was a trump card in British hands.

The boundary questions raised by the Burmese proved extremely vexatious. The outstanding one related to the Kabaw valley between the River Chindwin and the Manipur mountains. The Burmese had been driven from it during the war by Raja Gumbheer Singh. His British advisers, Major Grant and Lieutenant Pemberton, declared the Chindwin to be the historic boundary between Manipur and Burma. This was hotly disputed by the Burmese, who claimed the valley as theirs by prescriptive right. The matter was discussed between the Governor of Rangoon and Campbell, and it was agreed that Grant and Pemberton should be deputed as commissioners to meet a Burmese deputation in order to settle the dispute on the spot. The Burmese commissioners arrived on the scene shortly before the rains were due, and brought with them a map, which Pemberton, who had already surveyed the whole of the Indian north-eastern frontier, declared to be a fake, as indeed it was. As the weather made it impossible then to carry out a further survey to check up on the map, it was arranged that the commissioners should all meet in January, 1829, and tour the area. When the fixed date arrived, however, no Burmese commissioners appeared. Instead, some very flimsy excuses were sent. The Supreme Government therefore decided the matter in favour of the Raja of Manipur, and when at last a year later the commissioners did meet, the English members, to the consternation of their Burmese colleagues, planted boundary flags on the banks of the Chindwin. The news of this caused the greatest excitement at Ava. By this time, however, the Supreme Government had announced its decision to appoint a permanent Resident at the Court, and it was decided to await his arrival before taking any further action.

Meanwhile on the Salween frontier between Burmese Martaban and British Moulmein serious outrages had become almost the order of the day. Dacoits from the Burmese side constantly attacked the boats of British subjects using the river. Similar outrages were also occurring on the Arakan frontier. Burmese frontier officers were known to be sharing the proceeds of these affrays, and the

British authorities in both provinces were at a loss to know how to deal with them. The situation became so unpleasant that in March, 1829, the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck, went personally to Moulmein to confer with officers on the spot regarding measures for restoring order. Representations both to the Governor of Rangoon and the Court of Ava had no effect whatever. The vigilance of the British police craft on the Salween put a certain check upon the dacoits, but when, under their very noses, a party of sixty raiders landed a few yards from the Commissioner's own residence, Major Maingy, Campbell's successor, felt that drastic action must be taken. Major Burney, his chief assistant, was sent to Rangoon with a list of the names of the leaders and a demand for their surrender. The Governor of Martaban, however, refused to give them up. Thereupon two companies of British troops marched into Martaban to seize the culprits. They found the place completely deserted; governor and population had fled to the jungle. The troops were followed by the outraged inhabitants of Moulmein, who promptly burnt to the ground the town itself and three neighbouring villages, while the troops were out searching the jungles. Neither Rangoon nor Ava took the slightest notice of this incident. For a time it had a salutary effect; but only for a time. Frontier outrages continued to be a thorn in the flesh of British administrators in Tenasserim for many years, and were not brought to an end until, with the second Burmese War of 1852, the whole of Lower Burma came into British hands.)

(Such was the situation which induced the Supreme Government at the end of 1829 to reconsider the question of establishing a permanent Resident at Ava.) There were many precedents for such action in the Company's history. In the latter part of the seventeenth century a Resident had been maintained at the Maratha Durbar at Poona to preserve friendship and extend trade. The British Resident at Syriam in the first half of the next century had been appointed with the same object. Later, with the development of the subsidiary alliance system, the content and scope of the powers exercised by the Company's representatives in such states as Hyderabad, Mysore and Oude had correspondingly developed, so that they had become essentially political agents. After the Nepal War of 1816, when a Resident was appointed to Khatmandu, we see the first application of the method to an independent state. Here, indeed, was the closest precedent for what was now attempted in Burma.

||By the end of 1829 the Burma problem had become so vexatious that it was felt to be useless to leave diplomatic relations with Ava in the hands of the Commissioner of Tenasserim.|| The maintenance of a permanent Resident was also strongly urged by three men, who had had long and intimate experience of conditions at the Burmese capital, the merchants Gouger and Laird, and Dr. Adoniram Judson, the American Baptist missionary, then at Moulmein. || There was moreover another argument in favour of it, that we seem to have heard before, namely, the danger of another European power stepping in and queering the Company's pitch, if the way were left open.|| Hence, in conformity with the seventh article of the Treaty of Yandabo Major Henry Burney of the 25th Bengal Native Infantry was on 31st December 1829 appointed to reside at the Court of Ava on behalf of the Honourable East India Company.||

Although only in his thirty-eighth year Burney had already filled several official positions, notably that of Political Agent to Siam, with distinction. He was not, as some writers have supposed, a brother of the famous Fanny, Madame D'Arblay, but was the son of Richard Thomas Burney, her half-brother, who had been Second Master of the Calcutta Military Orphan School.<sup>1</sup> No better choice could have been made for so arduous and difficult a task. || Burney had a charming and attractive personality. He was patient, tactful, very intelligent and transparently honest. And eventually he won the trust and admiration of the hostile and suspicious Court, to which he was deputed under such adverse circumstances. His instructions were to deal with all outstanding matters, the indemnity, the frontier troubles, the retrocession suggestion, and trade, and to seek to build up good relations between Ava and Calcutta.

|| In April, 1830, Burney, with an escort of sepoys, arrived at the capital.|| He found that what at first sight appeared to be a neat pucca-built house had been prepared for his reception, close to the river, between the Royal Elephant Palace and the north-west angle of the wall of the outer city. He was fully aware of the sort of treatment the Burmese ministers were prepared to mete out to a British representative. Hence from the start his attitude was friendly but absolutely firm. He would not be received at Court on a "kodaw" day, he would not make a formal obeisance to the palace before entering, nor would he leave his shoes outside the palace enclosure. As a result, weeks were taken up in discussions regarding the method

<sup>1</sup>He died while on a visit to Rangoon in 1808.

of his formal reception by the King. When at last he was received, in the middle of June, he accepted an honourable compromise whereby he unslipped at the palace steps, without having to make any of the other formal signs of submission. The Court was specially assembled for the ceremony and wore full dress.

Discussions about the big questions at issue, the Kabaw valley, the payment of the indemnity and retrocession began long before the date of the royal audience. Burney persuaded the ministers to allow him to invite Lieutenant Pemberton to the capital to state his case. When he arrived, with a Manipuri bodyguard on little shaggy ponies, Burney had already managed to establish friendly relations with the Court; and these happily counteracted the extremely hostile feeling with which the Burmese viewed this new invasion by their old enemies. Pemberton was received by the King and presented him with a handsome gun. || Ultimately the King consented to submit the Burmese claim to the Kabaw valley to the Governor-General, and for the time being this matter dropped into the background, pending the despatch of another Burmese embassy to Calcutta.||

During the later months of the year 1830 Burney's relations with the Court continued to improve. He was received cordially by the Hluttaw, the supreme council of the realm. The Wungyis, who formed the highest grade of royal servants, came to dinner with him, a high honour indeed, such as had never previously been accorded to any British envoy. They seemed to enjoy the experience, since afterwards they came whenever they were invited, and in a friendly, unceremonious way. Burney was even called in to mediate when one of the King's Assamese ladies was charged with a conspiracy to place her brother on the throne of Assam. When he demonstrated the baselessness of the charge, the Wungyis thanked him for his good offices. And notwithstanding the other thorny problems that continued under discussion, he became so much a *persona grata* at Court, that in February, 1831, the King personally conferred on him the gold salwe, the highest Burmese order, and the title of Wundauk<sup>1</sup>.

He was often invited by the King to the animal shows and boat races of which the latter was inordinately fond. His majesty became so friendly that they even had long chats together on guns, painting, books and other unpolitical subjects, and the King would address

<sup>1</sup>Assistant-minister, i.e., next in rank to a Wungyi.

him familiarly as "Bhauranee", the Burmese corruption of his name. On one occasion Burney had to translate for the King the chief contents of a Bengal newspaper and found him highly diverted by its advertisement columns. When Burney appeared before him in mourning for the death of George IV, the King as a joke asked him why he did not blacken his face in addition to wearing black crepe on his arm and black gloves, and the whole court roared with glee. Unfortunately all this was cut short in March, 1831, when the King became seriously ill with the mental derangement which clouded the remainder of his life. He had never got over the shock of his defeat at the hands of the British, and the Kabaw valley question preyed upon his mind so much that the ministers advised Burney not to see him, since the sight of the British Resident only served to remind him of his humiliation.

Meanwhile the political discussions went on both at Ava and at Calcutta. Another Burmese mission had gone to India late in 1830 to lodge a further appeal regarding the Kabaw valley and the indemnity. They had to wait for a considerable period, because the Governor-General was away on tour and could not attend to their business. In April, 1832, Burney was recalled to Calcutta to join in the discussions. By this time, as a result of exhaustive enquiries involving the consultation of Burmese official records, Burney had come to the conclusion that notwithstanding Pemberton's arguments the Burmese case was a sound one. The records showed that the valley had for a considerable period been regarded as Burmese territory, and they had uninterruptedly occupied it for twelve years previous to the war. He therefore recommended to the Supreme Government that it should be handed back to Burma; and to the great satisfaction of the Burmese that was agreed upon in March, 1833. On the subject of the payment of the full amount of the indemnity, however, the Government of India was adamant. And when all attempts to evade payment failed, the final instalment was handed over on the 27th of October, 1832.

One of the chief objects of Burney's mission to Ava was to go into the question of the possible retrocession of Tennasserim to Burma. The original idea of the Supreme Government was that either it might be exchanged for more suitable territory elsewhere or sold back to the Court of Ava. They were most anxious that the Burmese should not suspect their real motive. Burney's surprise, when on arrival at Ava he discovered that the Court not only was

fully aware of it, but was also fully prepared to take over the administration of the province, may easily be imagined. He had not realized that one of the jobs of the Burmese intelligence service, such as it was, was the study the Calcutta press and report anything interesting to the King. The Burmese, however, made the supreme mistake of believing that the British were so anxious to get rid of Tenasserim, that they had only to bide their time and they would get it back on their own terms.

Burney failed to rid their minds of this elementary misconception until one day he lightheartedly let drop a hint, which gravely disturbed the complacency of the ministers. He suggested that his government might consider selling the province to Siam. This worried them exceedingly, and he derived no little amusement from the many signs of discomfiture which they could not conceal. They hurriedly turned the discussions to the subject of the rectification of the Salween boundary, but he refused to go into any further details without fresh instruction from his government. He warned them that in all these discussions they had spoilt their case by conveying the impression that they were the sort of people "to whom if you yield a thumb breadth they will demand a fathom." The upshot of it all was that the Home Government came to the conclusion that it was quite impossible to do a satisfactory deal with the Burmese, and so the whole question of retrocession was ruled out.

Such were the main subjects dealt with during the early years of Burney's tenure of his post. There were, of course, many other problems to solve as time went on: the smuggling of specie out of the country by English merchants in Rangoon, the question of the regulation of trade there, problems arising out of the weakness of Burmese control over the wild tribes on the Assam frontier, and the seventh article in the Yandabo Treaty whereby the Burmese had promised to maintain a Resident in Calcutta. In this last matter Burney completely failed to persuade the Court to carry out its undertaking. It was willing to send an *ad hoc* mission to plead for the return of the Kabaw Valley, or to raise obstacles in the way of the payment of the remainder of the indemnity, as we have seen; and individual ministers were willing to admit the benefits that would arise from a better knowledge of the outside world, such as would be gained through closer contact with Calcutta; but it would not appoint a resident ambassador. And the envoys deputed upon special missions were always nonentities, who possessed neither ability

nor influence. From a western standpoint this was stupid and unfortunate. But, given the particular form of monarchy possessed by Burma in those days, it was both understandable and logical. If your ministers are your slaves, don't trust them out of your sight for too long.

Prevented from exploiting this means of breaking down Burma's political isolation Burney tried another. He endeavoured to persuade the ministers to send Burmese youths of good family to Calcutta for education. Their reply was illuminating: "Burmese parents are not like English ones. We cannot part with our children and let them, when young, go away to such a distance and for such a long period as you appear to do."

Burney's health while at Ava was never very good. On two occasions, in 1832 and again 1834, it broke down and he had to take furlough. The chief cause of trouble was not the climate, but the tremendous mental strain imposed by the conditions under which he had to live. He himself well described it in a letter which he wrote in 1834. "When any important event or discussion arises here, the consideration that there exists no certain means of communicating with your own Government which possesses less knowledge of the real character and customs of this than of any other Indian Court, greatly enhances in such a climate and situation, near a crazy King and an ignorant and trembling set of Ministers, the mental anxiety which preys upon the health of a public servant holding a highly responsible office." He longed to close down the uncomfortable little Residency at the capital and transfer everything to Rangoon, where he felt he could do better work. But the Supreme Government would not listen to his pleadings.

When Burney returned to Ava from furlough in July, 1835, his heart must have warmed at the genuine display of kindness and pleasure with which the ministers greeted him. He had indeed become in the true sense a *persona grata* with them, and might have hoped that with such an established position his task would henceforth become lighter. Instead, however, his difficulties thickened. In the first place, the King received him in so markedly unfriendly a manner that, notwithstanding his insanity, the tongues began to wag with such malicious suggestions, that Burney had to put in an official protest. Then to his great disappointment, Maung Khaing, the able and friendly governor of Rangoon, died in August, 1835, and in spite of Burney's strenuous efforts, a protégé of the Queen's,

Maung Wa, totally unfit for the post, was appointed. He was completely ignorant of European customs, and it was not long before serious complaints of extortion and molestation were coming in.

But the most trying time was yet to come. During King Bagyidaw's insanity all real power was in the hands of the Queen and her brother, the Minthagyi. Both were of very low origin and were detested by the rest of the royal family. The leader of the discontents was Bagyidaw's brother, the Tharrawaddy Prince, who was firmly convinced that the Minthagyi aimed at seizing the throne. In February, 1837, matters came to a climax, when the Minthagyi seized some of Tharrawaddy's chief supporters and put them in irons. Tharrawaddy immediately collected troops and prepared to resist. He also sent a messenger to Burney to ask what he would do in the event of a quarrel breaking out. Burney replied that he was forbidden by his government to interfere, but offered his good offices to prevent a rupture. Although he was in that most difficult position wherein a neutral usually earns the kicks of both sides, he was unwearied in his efforts to compose the quarrel. In this he failed. Tharrawaddy rebelled, and, according to the tradition of his house, when seeking a change of government, fled from the capital to Shwebo, the original home of the dynasty. Here he collected his forces and began to threaten Ava.

At this critical juncture Burney was anxious to retire from the capital and leave the rival forces to fight the matter out. But the ministers were in a state of panic and refused to let him go. He suggested therefore that he should be sent to Shwebo as a mediator. This was gladly agreed to. Accordingly to Shwebo he went, only to be told plainly by Tharrawaddy that he intended to sack Ava and execute the Queen and her brother. It was now plain that he intended to seize the throne for himself. Burney warned him of the evil consequences of any such resort to undue force or cruelty, and finally persuaded him to agree to refrain from plunder and bloodshed if the government submitted to him. With this promise he returned to Ava and urged the King and ministers to accept the Prince's terms. They begged him to return to Shwebo and obtain a definite pledge from Tharrawaddy, but two journeys of forty miles on horseback under a March sun had exhausted him. Instead, he sent his clerk, Edwards, with a letter assuring the Prince that the King would not resist, if he could receive a firm pledge regarding

plunder and bloodshed. Tharrawaddy replied that he would faithfully keep the pledge he had given to Colonel Burney. After eight more days of hesitations and negotiations, in which Burney played an important part, the Court surrendered to Tharrawaddy at Sagaing. Ava was far better armed and garrisoned than any force Tharrawaddy could have brought against it at the time. There was, however, no leader in the capital and complete panic reigned among the royal troops. Hence the course advised by Burney was the only practicable one, queer though it may seem.

As soon as Tharrawaddy was in possession of the throne, he showed signs of repenting of the promises he had made to Burney. The Minthagyи and his colleagues were clapped into the common jail in irons and their families put to the torture. The hope was that they could be made to reveal hidden treasures. The dacoit leaders who had helped Tharrawaddy wanted pay, since they were not permitted to plunder the capital. Burney visited the ministers in prison and was deeply shocked. The Minthagyи offered him a large bribe to take up his cause, and when this was refused, tripled the amount, thinking that his original offer had been inadequate. Tharrawaddy turned a deaf ear to Burney's protests. Five of the imprisoned ministers were cruelly done to death, and the Minthagyи's wife and daughters horribly tortured. Burney's protests became stronger. Tharrawaddy grew angry at this interference with his royal right to break a promise, and to deal with his subjects as he pleased. His new position had gone to his head. "These hat-wearing people cannot bear to see or hear of women being beaten or maltreated," he said with scorn. But there were no more executions: he had a wholesome regard for Burney. And when it is remembered that the accession of a new King of Burma was always the occasion for a general massacre, and that when Bagyidaw himself came to the throne in 1819 no less than 200 people had been executed, the real success of Burney's mediatorial efforts becomes plain.

The new ministers appointed by Tharrawaddy were described by Burney as "coarse ill-informed characters". One was an escaped criminal from the British jail at Moulmein. Tharrawaddy himself had had no training for his onerous post, and disliked business. Hence, although Burney and he knew each other well personally, the new King soon left the Resident severely alone. The inevitable misunderstandings followed. But the King's refusal to consider himself bound by any treaties made by his predecessors was the main

cause of trouble, Burney learnt with no little consternation that there was a party at Court which believed it possible to recover by force of arms the territory lost at Yandabo, and that the King was much impressed by their arguments. As his health was bad again and he was in urgent need of a change of scene, he asked permission to remove the Residency temporarily to Rangoon. The King readily acquiesced; he had come to regard the Residency as an unnecessary humiliation. It was the symbol of a treaty he refused to recognize. He liked Burney personally, and it is doubtful if he ever seriously envisaged courting war with the British. But he was intoxicated with his new dignity, and very anxious to emulate his ancestor, Alaungpaya. And he was developing a taste for alcohol.

Burney left the capital on 17th June and proceeded to Rangoon. The Government of India, however, was not at all satisfied with the new arrangement. It thought that he had taken the King's attitude towards the treaties too seriously, and that notwithstanding the difficulties of the position, it was absolutely essential for there to be a Resident at Ava, who could transmit to Calcutta accurate information regarding everything that happened there. This was, of course, perfectly true, but, as Burney pointed out in defending his action, to have stayed on at the capital might have resulted in his being treated to some outrage which would have endangered peace. He suggested that the Residency should not be re-established at Ava until the King had consented to recognize the Treaty of Yandabo. As Tharrawaddy was energetically importing arms and ammunition, and calling up more men to the colours than were needed for peace-time purposes, Burney even suggested the feasibility of military action to coerce the Burmese. But Lord Auckland's government refused to consider such a course, though it did strengthen all the frontier garrisons. At the same time, as Burney was obviously a sick man, he was permitted to return to Calcutta, and it was decided to appoint another Resident in his place.

(At Calcutta Burney stoutly defended himself against the censure which the Supreme Government had passed upon his action in withdrawing from Ava and recommending the use of military sanctions against Tharrawaddy.) He contended that he had acted in accordance with his instructions, which had laid it down that he might leave the capital if the Court of Ava showed invincible hostility to the Residency; and he warned the Governor-General that under existing conditions in Burma any attempt to maintain a

Resident there would be doomed to failure. His words were prophetic; he knew the situation he had had to deal with far better than did his superiors at a safe distance in Calcutta. In September, 1837, before he left the country, the Governor of Rangoon had summed up the situation thus: "You are all wrong in supposing that the King is going to attack you immediately. He has plenty to do just now in settling his kingdom; but in two or three years hence, when we are better prepared, we shall either ask you to sell us the Tenasserim provinces back, or fight you like men and try to recover them." But the ignorant jaunty Lord Auckland had his eyes fixed upon the North-Western Frontier and was particularly anxious not to be bothered with Burma. Hence pending the appointment of a successor to Burney, his assistant, G. T. Bayfield, was left in charge at Rangoon.

The remainder of the story of the first attempt to maintain a British Residency at the Court of Ava may be briefly told. In May, 1838, Colonel Richard Benson of the 11th Native Infantry, Bengal Army, was appointed Resident and shortly afterwards proceeded to Moulmein. He took with him a letter to the King so injudiciously phrased that he was advised by Dr. Judson and British officials there not to deliver it, and wisely took their advice. Judson warned him also of the kind of reception he might expect to receive at the capital, which Tharrawaddy had removed to Amarapoora. The King was strongly averse to receiving another Resident at his capital. Although he was not prepared to go to war with the British, he decided to make things so unpleasant for Colonel Benson that he would be forced to withdraw. This policy was put into effect without mercy. Benson was lodged in most unsuitable quarters outside the city, and the King refused either to see him or to recognize him. After a few weeks of it Benson reported to Calcutta that his treatment was "such as no English gentleman or more extensively no British subject ought to be exposed to". He was authorized to retire from the capital if the attitude of the Court did not improve. For some time war was seriously discussed by both sides and some show of preparation made. Then Benson's health gave way and in March, 1839, he left Amarapoora after handing over charge to his assistant, Captain William McLeod.

McLeod managed to secure an audience of the King and transact some business with the ministers, but in general his treatment was no better than Benson's. Tharrawaddy, who was beginning to show

the same signs of insanity as his predecessor, constantly talked of war, and was regaled by flatterers with all sorts of tall stories of British defeats in Afghanistan. (By degrees the Government of India became alarmed at the Burma situation, and there is no doubt that only the Afghan War prevented it from taking the advice originally given it by Benson that nothing short of invasion would bring the Burmese to their senses. Meanwhile one humiliation after another was heaped upon McLeod at Amarapoora until at last he could stand it no longer.) When the rains broke in the summer of 1839 the Residency compound was completely under water, in some places to a depth of five feet. When he asked for more suitable quarters the ministers made no reply. Hence there was nothing for it but to quit. In July he left for Rangoon. Early the next year the Government of India reluctantly decided that it was impossible to maintain diplomatic relations with Burma any longer, and he was withdrawn. Tharrawaddy's glee was unbounded. The breakdown of every British Resident's health at his capital had become his stock joke.

## CHAPTER XIV

### LORD DALHOUSIE AND THE ANNEXATION OF PEGU

DURING THE LATER YEARS OF BAGYIDAW'S REIGN FRONTIER DACOITY, especially in the Martaban-Moulmein region, had been giving the British local officers much less trouble. In 1840, however, with the withdrawal of the Residency, and the rumours of impending war, large numbers of dacoits began to assemble on the west bank of the Salween. In October, 1841, accompanied by a vast concourse of followers, Tharrawaddy paid a ceremonial visit to Rangoon. The general opinion in Burma was that this was the prelude to a full-scale attack upon Tenasserim. Hence the dacoits on the Salween began to make a serious nuisance of themselves. The Government of India had to take cognisance of the matter, and ordered the Commissioner of Tenasserim, Mr. Blundell, to take very thorough measures for stamping out the trouble. Blundell, however, suggested that action of a far more comprehensive kind was necessary. He pointed out that the dacoities were officially encouraged, and that it was the aim of the Burmese government to spread alarm on the British side of the frontier by such acts. His advice, however, was not adopted, and although these incidents continued, peace was maintained between the British and Burma. Tharrawaddy was wise enough not to push things too far.

As time went on Tharrawaddy's fits of ungovernable fury became worse. There were times when he had to be put under restraint by his sons. In 1846 while in confinement he died and was succeeded by his eldest son, Pagan Min, who had assumed control during his father's periods of madness. The new king began his reign by executing as many of his relatives as he could lay hands on. His ministers were of an even worse type than those of his father, mere ruffians, such as the Kyauk Padaung Mingyi, once a dacoit leader, and the two Moslem Myowuns of Amarapoora, Maung Bhai Sahib and Maung Bhein. His rule was in the true Augustinian sense brigandage on the big scale. His practice was to enrich himself by bringing about the deaths of well-to-do subjects and confiscating their property. Thousands of them were done to death in this way during

the first few years of his reign. The King spent his time in cock-fighting, gambling and debauchery. He hardly attended to business, and the central control over the administration of the country practically broke down. Local governors like Gaung Gyi of Tharrā-waddy, later a famous dacoit leader, were as independent as the marcher lords of the Middle Ages in Europe.

Maung Ok, who was appointed Governor of Pegu Province in 1846, followed his sovereign's example. And the trade of Rangoon afforded him excellent scope for feathering his nest. In July, 1851, he arrested a Mr. Sheppard, master of a British barque, the *Monarch*, on a fictitious charge of murdering his pilot, and extorted from him and his crew a heavy sum in fines and bribes. In the following month he tried the same game on a Mr. Lewis, master of a British barque, the *Champion*. Both men laid complaints before the Supreme Government at Calcutta and submitted claims—somewhat excessive, it was discovered—for damages against the Rangoon authority. There was, of course, rather more in these two outrages than clumsy methods of obtaining easy money. Maung Ok and his master shared a feeling of extreme bitterness against Englishmen.

It was a strangely inopportune moment to stage an anti-British demonstration. Lord Dalhousie was Governor-General of India. He had already brought the Sikh War to a successful conclusion, and his hands were free. Compared with the chronic frontier troubles and the insolent threats of war in the past, the maltreatment of two merchants was a trifling affair. But his study of Anglo-Burmese relations from the Treaty of Yandabo onwards made him feel that the situation must be firmly handled. He realized that a demand for reparation would certainly be rejected by the Burmese. On the other hand he believed that the policy of tamely submitting to the insults of the Court of Ava was fraught with real danger and might seriously affect British prestige in the East. As he himself put it in an official minute, "the Government of India could never, consistently with its own safety, permit itself to stand for a single day in an attitude of inferiority towards a native power, and least of all towards the Court of Ava." Hence he decided to send in a demand for reparation in such a way as would make the Burmese think twice before they refused.

The mission was entrusted to Commodore Lambert, who steamed off to Rangoon in H.M.S. *Fox* together with two Company's vessels, the *Prosperine* and the *Tenasserim*. He bore a letter, addressed to

the King, demanding due compensation and the removal of the offending Governor. Right from the start Lambert was treated with the studied insolence in which Burmese officials were so fatally expert. But the Court promised redress and Maung Ok was superseded. Unfortunately, the new man was just as hostile as his predecessor. And he was accompanied by a considerable body of troops, while at the same time large detachments were sent to Bassein and Martaban. As it was understood that he had been given full powers to deal with the compensation question, Lambert sent Commander Fishbourne at the head of a deputation to lay a claim amounting to Rs. 9,948 before him. The deputation, however, was refused admittance in a grossly insulting manner, and to make matters worse, the Governor sent a message to Lambert referring to the deputation as a party of drunken officers, who had attempted to disturb his siesta.

Lambert at once saw red. He declared a blockade of the port and proceeded to make reprisals upon Burmese shipping. The Burmese manned the stockades and began to fire at his ships. So he fired a broadside from the *Fox* into the stockade, where its 3,000 defenders fled to a man. Then, having destroyed every Burmese war-boat in the harbour, he sailed away to Calcutta. "So all that fat is in the fire," wrote Lord Dalhousie to a friend. The action of the "combustible commodore", as Dalhousie called him, was indeed high-handed, but, as he also remarked, "we can't afford to be shown to the door anywhere in the East." Hence preliminary preparations for war were begun, and in the hope that the mere threat of war would suffice to bring the Court of Ava to its senses, an ultimatum was on 18th February, 1852, despatched to the King, together with a demand for compensation, this time to the extent of 10 lakhs of rupees,<sup>1</sup> to cover the cost already incurred by the Government of India in military preparations.

Dalhousie's conduct in these negotiations was strongly criticized in England. In particular Richard Cobden in a pamphlet entitled *How wars are got up in India: the Origin of the Burmese War* used the information published in the Parliamentary Papers for a slashing attack upon him. He censured especially the despatch of a Commodore of the Royal Navy to open the negotiations and the raising of Dalhousie's demands from less than Rs. 10,000 to a hundred times that amount. He questioned the wisdom of conquest

<sup>1</sup>Then about £100,000.

in Indo-China on financial, racial and moral grounds. It is an interesting piece of work, reflecting as it does the outlook of a notable leader of the peace movement in mid-nineteenth century England. But it ignores the basic facts of the situation as they must have presented themselves to responsible people on the spot. Dalhousie hoped against hope to the last moment that the Burmese would climb down, but at the same time he felt that the whole British position in India would be endangered if he weakly gave way, surrendered the Company's treaty rights and allowed Burmese insolence a further triumph. He had long regarded war as inevitable. The actual occasion of it was comparatively unimportant. He disapproved and censured Lambert's act. "If I had had the gift of prophecy I would not have employed Lambert to negotiate," he said afterwards, but he firmly believed that even without Lambert war could not have been avoided.

That his judgment was absolutely correct subsequent evidence from the Burmese side was to give ample proof. There was a strong war party at the Court among the younger officials, who believed that the new artillery manufactured by European adventurers in the King's service, and the new methods of training they had introduced into the army, rendered the Burmese a far more formidable foe than they had been in 1824. This party had gained the upper hand against the peace party led by the King's half-brother, Mindon Min. And the new Governor of Rangoon, who provoked Lambert's drastic action, was a member of the dominant party and went to Rangoon intent upon provoking war. The ultimatum expired on 1st April, 1852, without any reply from the Court of Ava. A few days later a British force occupied Martaban. Then on 12th April the main British expeditionary force sailed into Rangoon harbour. Even then Dalhousie held open the door for peace. A steamer was sent ahead under a flag of truce to ask for a reply to Dalhousie's demands. But the only reply was a warlike one from the batteries on shore.

The war which followed was in complete contrast to the previous one, which Dalhousie had most carefully studied in order to avoid its mistakes. The difficulties of organization, transport and co-operation were enormous, reflecting as they did the extraordinarily cumbersome and complicated machine by which British rule in India was carried on. There were two military and naval services, those of the Crown and those of the Company, and arrangements

for their co-operation demanded the exercise of the greatest possible forethought and tact. The expeditionary force sent to Burma was composed of detachments from the then separate armies of the Bengal and Madras Presidencies; and the task of apportioning to each the departments it was to furnish, and the special appointments its officers might fill, was one which had to be performed with minute care.

Lord Dalhousie was determined to overcome the problems of climate and transport which had been responsible for so much failure in the first war. A fleet of steamers placed Calcutta and Madras within easy communication with the forces operating in Burma. Materials were prepared ahead for the quick and easy construction of barracks. Plentiful supplies of fresh food were collected at Amherst. The best possible medical equipment was procured. Hospitals were built at Amherst, and a regular service of river steamers kept them in close touch with the expeditionary force. Everything was planned ahead and the Governor-General, working at very high pressure, went into every detail.

There were weak spots, but they were in realms over which Dalhousie did not have complete control. General Godwin, who commanded the land forces, and Rear-Admiral Austen,<sup>1</sup> the commander-in-chief of the naval forces, were both *septuagenarians*. The former was notorious for his jealousy of the Navy, and although without naval co-operation he could not have moved an inch, he was the sort of blundering old fool who could write officially to the Government that he would rather have charge of 50,000 men in the field than of 5,000 dependent upon naval support. It made him simply furious that when Austen died early in the campaign, Commodore Lambert, who acted temporarily as naval chief, took precedence of him, because he was for the time being Commander-in-Chief of H.M. Naval Forces in the Eastern Seas. Moreover, he had fought as a colonel in the First Burmese War and believed that, as Dalhousie himself expressed it, "nothing that was not done then can be done now—everything that was done then must be done over again now." He disagreed with Lord Dalhousie's whole plan of campaign, but the Governor-General tactfully talked him round. At certain stages of the campaign his dilatory tactics were utterly inexplicable, and called forth thundering letters from Dalhousie and attacks in the home press. *Punch*, for instance, published a

<sup>1</sup>Jane's brother.

caricature of the General standing buckling on his sword and saying to a sailor who was energetically knocking down a Burman, "Oh dear! this is quite irregular, very irregular!"

During the first Burmese War a very ugly scene had been enacted on the Barrackpur parade-ground near Calcutta. The 47th Native Infantry, partly for caste reasons and partly because at great cost to themselves they had to provide their own carriage, refused to obey orders when about to embark for service in Burma. The guns had been turned on them and many were mown down as they stood there. Afterwards hundreds of survivors were condemned by court-martial to long terms of penal servitude, the ring-leaders were hanged, and the name of the regiment effaced from the army list. At the beginning of the Second War a similar incident occurred. The 38th Native Infantry refused for caste reasons to proceed to Burma by sea. On this occasion, however, tragedy was averted by ordering the men to proceed to Arakan by road via Dacca. The project was at once taken up of attempting to link Calcutta and Rangoon by a road passing through Dacca to Akyab, thence over the Taungup Pass to Prome and Rangoon.

It was a gigantic operation, involving the reconditioning of an old road from Dacca to Chittagong, the selection of a new line from Chittagong to Akyab—a matter of 200 miles—so as to enable the rivers Naaf and Mayu to be conveniently bridged, and the construction of a raised roadway along it, not to mention the formidable task of building a road capable of taking military traffic over the Taungup Pass. So energetically, however, was it put in hand, that within six months of its commencement the road to Akyab was reported to be nearly finished. Ultimately the whole road was completed, but the development of sea communications between Calcutta, Akyab and Rangoon provided so much better and cheaper transport for peace-time traffic, that the sections of the road from Chittagong to Akyab, and thence across the Yomas to Prome, fell into such disrepair that in recent years they could hardly be called roads. They were mere bullock-cart tracks.

Dalhousie's plan of campaign was to seize the ports of Martaban, Rangoon and Bassein before the rainy season set in, and then sit tight to await overtures from Ava. He hoped that this would be sufficient to cause the Burmese government to offer terms. Rangoon was taken after only three days' assault and with only eighteen fatal casualties, some from sunstroke. Bassein also was easily

captured. Then the three cities were put into a defensible condition ready for the rains. But to Dalhousie's complete surprise no sign whatever came from the Golden Feet. The King, it transpired, was under the illusion that when the wet monsoon really got going, his generals, cholera and malaria, would so decimate his enemies, that his invincible armies could then drive them into the sea. In point of fact, however, Lord Dalhousie's precautionary measures were so effective that the mortality among all forces was kept lower than the peace-time average for the army in India at that time of year.

As the months dragged on and no sign came from Amarapoora, Dalhousie became thoroughly perplexed. "This beats Nero's fiddling while Rome burnt," he wrote on hearing that the King was devoting most of his time to the national sport of cock-fighting. Most unwillingly he came to the conclusion that the only way of dealing effectively with the Burmese would be by annexing the province of Pegu. How genuine was his feeling may be seen from a private letter he wrote to his great friend, Sir George Couper, in which he said: "Daily I am more mortified and disheartened by the political necessity which I see before me." When, however, he had finally made up his mind, he had no further doubts. In another private letter he wrote that if the Court of Directors should refuse to annex Pegu and thus "check their own inevitable progress for a while, I should still say of the British Empire in the East as Galileo of the earth, 'Still it moves'."

In submitting his proposal to the home government Dalhousie with his usual thoroughness considered it along with four other possible courses of action. The first was that of retirement without exacting any cession, but having demonstrated the superiority of British arms. History, he said, was against such a course: it would be completely misunderstood. The second was to retain Martaban only. This, he thought, would afford no guarantee for future peace. The third was to hold Rangoon and Martaban. The objection to this was that the Burmese would develop Bassein as their chief port, and that the defence of Rangoon would be difficult. The fourth possible course was that of holding Martaban, Rangoon and Bassein. This, however, would incur very heavy expense without any compensating revenue to speak of. Hence the only practical course was that of taking over the whole province up to some line north of Prome, thereby linking up Arakan and Tenasserim and strengthening British hold over the territories already in their hands.

Having made his proposal Dalhousie set about his preparations for the military occupation of the province as soon as weather conditions permitted. Late in July he was in Rangoon conferring with Godwin and Lambert. He found the fire-eating old General anxious to push on right up to Amarapoora, and had very firmly to tell him that such a course was impracticable and unnecessary. The cost alone would be enormous. It was agreed therefore that the expeditionary force should halt at Prome.

*¶¶* The home authorities warmly approved Dalhousie's conduct of the war and sanctioned the permanent annexation of Pegu. Then a new, and totally unforeseen, difficulty suddenly cropped up. The Secret Committee informed Dalhousie that the Court of Ava must be forced, under threat of the complete subjugation of the country, to make a treaty recognizing the annexation. And the London press, which at the outset had loudly counselled caution and moderation, now executed an astounding *volte-face* by demanding either a dictated peace at the capital itself, or some other public humiliation for the Lord of the Universe. ¶¶

When early in November these new instructions arrived, Prome had been taken, after merely a token resistance by the Burmese army, and the Burmese generalissimo, the amiable but incompetent son of the great Bandula, had surrendered in order to escape the punishment awaiting him at Amarapoora. *¶¶* Dalhousie refused to alter his plans. He told the home government that while among civilized states treaties were of value, eastern nations set little store by them. A treaty with Burma, as past history showed, would merely be an embarrassment, since it would force the British Government to interfere whenever its stipulated rights were disregarded. There would be perpetual risk of quarrel. "The only consideration," he said, "which would induce such a power as Burma to refrain from hostilities, and to save our subjects harmless, is fear of our power and of the consequences if they should provoke its exercise. If they have that fear, a treaty is superfluous for our protection: if they have it not, a treaty is worthless." If the Secret Committee insisted upon a treaty, he would do his best to obtain one, but he thought it most improbable that the King would ever formally cede Pegu. *¶¶* The national pride of the Burmese would revolt against such a humiliation. Then, if we had to occupy the capital, not only would the cost be enormous, but there would be other difficulties. Did the Committee realize that six degrees of latitude would have to be traversed

in order to subjugate the whole country? And had they considered the size of the military force that would be required for such an undertaking? We should merely be "encumbered with four hundred miles of additional territory, with enhanced expenses and disproportionate returns".

¶ Then he turned to the middle course which he advocated. The seizure of the province of Pegu would serve as a sufficient demonstration of British power. It would offer reparation for the past and security for the future. Its loss would render the Court of Ava militarily harmless, while at the same time giving the British an easily defensible frontier. The province could be held cheaply; it would afford Great Britain rich commerce and the promise of great natural wealth. And even if the Burmese refused formally to recognize its cession, they would silently acquiesce in its loss. Hence he would only proceed to the complete conquest of Burma if there was no other way of procuring peace.

Meanwhile, during November and December the systematic occupation of the province was proceeding against extremely weak enemy resistance, and on the 20th of December the Governor-General's proclamation annexing it was read with due ceremonial at Rangoon by Major Arthur Purves Phayre, whom Dalhousie had appointed as Commissioner of the new acquisition. ¶ Still no hint of negotiations came from the Golden Feet. But while Dalhousie was reluctantly making plans for a march on the capital, a dramatic turn of events there changed the whole situation. Pagan Min's half-brother, Mindon Min, had, as we have already seen, been the leader of a peace party. At first the general enthusiasm for the war had been so great that he and his supporters had been mere voices crying in the wilderness. Now the Burmese disasters had caused him to become a popular idol, to whom everybody looked to restore the situation. The King and his favourite, Maung Bwa, therefore decided to get rid of him. Mindon, warned of his danger, fled the capital on 17th December and together with his younger brother, the Kanoung Min, made his way in traditional style to Shwebo, as on a previous occasion his father, Tharrawaddy, had done. Here adherents flocked to the two princes, and their forces were soon threatening Amarapoora. ¶ There was some confused fighting for some weeks until suddenly, on the 18th of February, 1853, the Magwe Mingyi, the senior Wungyi of the Hluttaw, declared for Mindon and seized the chief members of the government. ¶ Mindon

discreetly remained at Shwebo while all his enemies were being put away—also in traditional fashion—and then entered the capital and was hailed as King. Contrary to the usual practice he permitted Pagan Min to retire into honourable captivity. He survived until 1881. . .

The new King hated bloodshed, possessed unusual intelligence and throughout his reign exhibited a high sense of public duty. After the horrors of the previous reigns it was not long before his justice and magnanimity won him the sincere affection of his people. From the start he sought for friendly relations with the British. One of his first acts was to release all the Europeans imprisoned at Amarapoora, and to despatch two of them, the Italian priests, Father Domingo Tarolly and Father Abbona, to Prome to inform the British leaders of what had taken place, and assure them that as soon as possible envoys to treat for peace would be sent. To their surprise, the emissaries on arriving at Myede, fifty miles north of Prome, found the British forces established there. The British had found Prome a very unhealthy spot, quite unsuitable for their troops. Moreover, the new Commissioner was aware that the best teak forests were to the north; and as the proclamation of annexation made no definite specification of the northern boundary of the Pegu province, he and his colleagues, Godwin and Lambert, had decided to push on in search of a more suitable place for a frontier station, and withal one which would enable a rich belt of forest land to be included in British territory. This step had been unhesitatingly sanctioned by Lord Dalhousie. Thus had Pagan Min's dilatory tactics caused him to lose not only the fair province of Pegu up to Prome, but in addition a further slice of territory, which made the acquisition of altogether higher value to the conquerors. From Myede therefore the two Italian priests were sent back to Mindon Min with a Burmese translation of the proclamation of annexation and an invitation to recognize a *fait accompli*.

## CHAPTER XV

### ARTHUR PHAYRE AND THOMAS SPEARS

THE NEW COMMISSIONER OF PEGU, CHARGED AS GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S Agent to conduct the delicate task of negotiating with the Court of Ava, was one of the most remarkable men Great Britain has ever sent to Burma. • In appointing him Lord Dalhousie deliberately passed over the claims of his senior officer, Lieut.-Colonel Archibald Bogle, the Commissioner of the Tenasserim Provinces, who had been so anxious to be transferred to the Pegu post, that he earned a sharp rap over the knuckles from the Governor-General by voicing an indiscreet protest. Bogle had, unfortunately, served in the First Burmese War, and Dalhousie's experience of General Godwin had taught him to prefer a younger man for a job that he knew would be exceptionally arduous. Bogle therefore was consoled with a knighthood and a large addition to his salary which raised it above Phayre's.

Phayre was forty years old in 1852, the son of an Irishman, Richard Phayre, who after a career in the East India Company's service had settled at Shrewsbury and married Maria Ridgway, a daughter of the well-known publisher. She was a woman of great talents who instilled into her two sons a deep devotion to duty. Educated at Shrewsbury School, Arthur Phayre had entered the Bengal Army at the age of sixteen. He soon showed that his interests lay in administration rather than in military affairs, and after service at Moulmein, was transferred in 1837 to Arakan as senior assistant to the Commissioner, then Captain Archibald Bogle. There he distinguished himself in putting down dacoity in the Sandoway district. After further service at Moulmein and in the Sikh War he returned to Arakan in 1848 as Commissioner.

During these early years we know little of him personally, save that again and again in official documents his zeal and hard work are favourably commented upon. He was always excessively modest, scholarly and somewhat lacking in self-assertion. Only a great judge of men such as Lord Dalhousie would ever have noted him down for the promotion he received in 1852. • His work was his life:

all his personal interests were bound up in it. What spare time he had was devoted to a close study of Indo-Chinese philology, ethnology and history. His *History of Burma* is a magnificent piece of pioneer work which held its own for many years. In his dealings with the Burmese he displayed an amiable disposition, a courtesy and a sense of humour which delighted them. He spoke their language exceptionally well and knew their life intimately. And he was firm, rarely ruffled and able to keep a cool head in a difficult situation. Between him and Lord Dalhousie a close friendship developed which enabled both to steer a safe course through the unexampled difficulties which beset them in organizing a new province and building up satisfactory relations with a deeply humiliated government. Their personal correspondence<sup>1</sup> makes fascinating reading, and throws a flood of light not only upon the problems with which they were faced, but also upon the characters of the two men who did so much towards opening a new chapter in the history of Anglo-Burmese relations. Contemporaries compared him with John Lawrence of the Punjab, and in Burma his name became a household word like that of the Lawrences in the Punjab. In 1881, long after his retirement from Burma, when on one occasion he was reading a paper before the Royal Society of Arts, the chairman, Sir Henry Norman, said: "To speak of Burma is to speak of Sir Arthur Phayre." But as Burma has received scanty attention from historians of British India, while "every schoolboy" knows at least the name of Lawrence, hardly anyone outside of Burma has ever heard of Phayre.

Commodore Lambert and General Godwin were associated with Phayre as his colleagues in the negotiations with the Court of Ava. In the official document nominating the three men joint commissioners for effecting a treaty Lambert's name, in accordance with strict etiquette, was mentioned first in order. This evoked from Godwin a petulant protest at the precedence accorded to a mere Commodore over a Major-General. When Lord Dalhousie rejected it, he received the following official remonstrance:

"Now, Sir, with all deference and respect to the extraordinary decision that Commodore (Captain) Lambert ranking with any Brigadier Generals (Colonels) is my superior officer and to sign before me in the Treaty, I must be allowed to act, if unfortunately

<sup>1</sup>D.G.E.Hall: *The Dalhousie-Phayre Correspondence, 1852-1856* (London, 1932).

called on, as a General Officer in my position must, to uphold the honour of the Army."

Lord Dalhousie could be imperious, but he could also be very patient. This was only one of a hundred similar difficulties which the old man was raising with fatal persistence. He did not believe that the public interest would be served by drastic action against Godwin. Hence he was spared even the indignity of an official reprimand, and the Governor-General contented himself on each occasion with taking adequate measures to circumvent the General's waywardness. And he never left Godwin in any doubt as to his own views. On this occasion his comment in the official minute is illuminating:

"I am unable to understand with certainty what these words are meant to convey. Reading them in connexion with the context of the despatch and construing them in accordance with the tone and spirit which pervade it, I can only conclude that Major General Godwin has meant to intimate that he intended to refuse to sign the Treaty. I trust that these words may be found capable of a more favourable interpretation."

The treaty, however, never materialized; so no one knows to this day what Godwin really intended to do. When Father Domingo handed to Mindon Min the proclamation of the annexation of Pegu, he was deeply grieved. At first he could not believe that it was anything more than bluff. He felt sure that if a sufficiently heavy indemnity were offered, the British would retire from the conquered province. He wanted to have a personal interview with Godwin and Phayre so that, when they realized the sort of man he was, they would not have the heart to deprive him of his ancestors' property. "The General and Commissioner could come in a steamer," he said to the Father, "and I could throw aside my state and converse, without my ministers being present." Only gradually did it dawn upon him that the British would treat on no other terms than the cession of Pegu. Such a thing he could not possibly bring himself to assent to publicly, as at the outset Lord Dalhousie had rightly guessed.

This situation became quite clear\* when the official Burmese Mission, headed by the senior Wungyi, the Magwe Mingyi, arrived at Prome on the last day of March. At first he humbly acknowledged Burmese responsibility for the outbreak of war, and begged for generous treatment to be given to Mindon Min on account of his opposition to the war. When the Commissioners pointed out that

they had no power to rescind the annexation, he began to haggle over the boundary line. The wearisome discussion dragged on for over a month at the hottest period of the year. At one of the conferences General Godwin, with characteristic irresponsibility, caused more than a mild sensation by taking the Burmese side against the Government of India's position. Finally, when the discussions appeared to have come to a dead end, Lord Dalhousie authorized the surrender of the additional territory between Prome and Myede if the Burmese would sign a treaty recognizing the cession of Pegu. The Wungyi at once brought the negotiations to an end by declaring that he had no power to sign away any territory. It was a strange and anomalous situation, and one which might have played into the hands of the old war party at the Court of Ava. The Kanoung Min, Mindon's brother and Heir Apparent, openly asked for a renewal of the war, and on both sides there were alarmist rumours of the most extravagant kind. Luckily, however, the King kept his head, in both senses. He sent a letter to Phayre assuring him of his peaceable intentions, and telling him that orders had been given to frontier officials not to allow any attacks upon the British. Lord Dalhousie decided to take him at his word. "All that is known of his character and past history," he noted, "mark him among Burmese rulers as a prince of rare sagacity, humanity and forbearance, and stamp his present declarations with the seal of sincerity." //

The official termination of hostilities was therefore proclaimed, but the army in Pegu was kept upon a war footing. General Godwin, however, relinquished his command and returned to India. That was so much to the good. He had caused further embarrassments during his last few weeks in command, sending in an absurd claim regarding war booty for the troops and refusing detachments of troops for the protection of civil officers taking up their duties in unsubdued districts. In a magnanimous final minute to the Secret Committee Dalhousie asked that all unfavourable comments upon the General should be forgotten and regard be had "only to the records of our satisfaction and praise". When the old general left he was given a farewell party by Phayre and about eighty officers. The rest of his story was told by Lord Dalhousie in a private letter to Phayre: "Escaped from battle and disease in Pegu, he went strong and gay to the European climate of Simla—and was dead in a week. It is very sad."

Meanwhile the diplomatic impasse continued, and each side was totally in the dark regarding the intentions of the other. Dacoit leaders were springing up with the greatest persistency and doing their best to prevent the British from settling the administration of the province. The Rangoon and Calcutta newspapers were convinced that the Court of Ava was secretly encouraging them and actively preparing to invade Pegu. The Deputy-Commissioner of Prome, Captain Latter, a gallant and distinguished officer and an expert scholar in Burmese, was allotted the task of procuring intelligence of events at Amarapoora. But his extraordinary credulity in passing on rumours that proved to be entirely baseless aroused Dalhousie's "deep disgust" and he wrote a thundering letter threatening to remove him. On the Burmese side of the frontier the situation was even worse, with everyone living in expectation of an early British advance from Myede so soon as the rains ended.

Under the circumstances Lord Dalhousie decided that in the absence of direct contact with the Court of Ava it had become imperative to establish a satisfactory system of intelligence. Captain Latter's stories of impending Burmese attacks caused Dalhousie to write to Phayre that he would grudge no expense in procuring trustworthy reports. By an extraordinary piece of luck exactly the right approach to the problem suddenly presented itself gratuitously to the Governor-General. Among the Europeans released by Mindon Min was a burly bearded Scottish trader named Thomas Spears. On his way to Calcutta after his release he was interviewed by Major Grant Allan, who had taken over the superintendence of intelligence from Captain Latter. The account that he gave of conditions at the capital showed that he was not only very well-informed but equally level-headed. Phayre at once realized that such a man in the position of British news-agent at Amarapoora would prove invaluable. He wrote therefore to Dalhousie asking him to see Spears and consider employing him in this capacity.

At first Lord Dalhousie fought shy of the proposal. Spears would be unable to keep his news-writing activities secret, and if they were known, he would be liable to outrage, and thus might involve the Government at Calcutta in unwelcome responsibilities, he thought. But letter after letter came pouring in from the credulous Latter predicting that in the next dry season the province would be ravaged up to the very walls of Rangoon. Hence the Governor-General told his Council that he intended to go to Burma as soon as





SIR ARTHUR PHAYRE

possible to investigate matters on the spot, and urged Phayre to continue in his search for a reliable correspondent. Phayre tried a prominent Armenian, Johannes Sarkies Manook, and found his news reliable but heard<sup>4</sup> that he was addicted to drink. Then he tried another Armenian named Jacob, and enclosed a priceless letter from him for the Governor-General's inspection. Part of it ran: "The Birmease Tawck great deal fighting the English but the Present King has no intention of Fighting it is his Brother the Prince Angshamain that thinks very great of himself, People comeing from your quarters they bring Parcel of false news . . ." Dalhousie's laconic comment on this was: "I hope his intelligence is more correct than his spelling." Late in the year 1853, when the Governor-General paid a second visit to Rangoon, and Spears was about to return to Amarapoora, the three men met together to talk things over and Phayre persuaded his chief that it was quite safe to appoint Spears. It was arranged that he should draw a regular monthly salary of Rs. 250, with the proviso that it should be made up to the amount of Rs. 400 a month at the end of each year of service, if he proved satisfactory.

The new British Correspondent at the Court of Ava was a native of Kirkcaldy in Fifeshire. He had resided for many years in Burma as a trader in piece-goods. He was a personal friend of R. S. Edwards, whom we have already met as the trusted secretary of Colonel Burney. His wife was a Burmese lady, Ma Cho, by whom he had six children.<sup>1</sup> He and Mindon Min were close friends. Hence, when he returned to Amarapoora in December, 1853, and reported to the King the nature of the work with which he was entrusted by the Governor-General, Mindon was highly delighted. He gave Spears absolute liberty to write what he liked to whom he liked. In fact the chief difficulty that arose was due to the King's ardent desire to use Spears as an official channel for his communications to the British authorities. He often gave him messages expressly for Phayre and even on occasions caused him no little embarrassment by almost dictating the contents of his letters. He continued to cherish the quixotic hope that if only the British could be brought to realize how true a friend he was to them they would give Pegu back to him.

Spears served both sides honestly and well, and again and again

<sup>4</sup>His last surviving child, William, died at Rangoon in September, 1929. From him the present writer obtained much interesting information regarding his father.

won the highest praise from Lord Dalhousie. In time all the intercourse between Ava and the British came to pass through his capable hands. Mindon would discuss every matter affecting British relations with him before taking official action. Phayre apprised him of all matters of importance from the British side. Both came to rely absolutely upon the good sense and statesmanship of this canny Scot. To the Burmese Government he explained the British point of view in a way that they could understand. To the British he was able to present a sane view of the state of affairs at Amarapoora and thus counteract alarmist reports. So well did things go that in March, 1854, Dalhousie was writing home gaily to his friend, Sir George Couper:

"There is perfect quiescence, and the King is actually withdrawing from the frontier his whole troops. Nay, the *entente cordiale* is becoming almost ludicrous. For at this very time, at which the Press is telling everybody that the Burmese are coming down with 80,000 men to invade us, I am actually making a contract with the King himself to sell us all the wheat in Burma—he monopolises the whole—for our commissariat in the province, which we have just conquered from him! Don't mention this, for I have not reported the bargain here till it shall have been completed. But is it not a comical fact!"

The contract referred to was, of course, the work of Thomas Spears. The province, which the English had just taken over, had once been, it must be remembered, a Mon kingdom. Burmese rule had been so harsh that what is naturally one of the richest agricultural regions in the world had long been stagnating in poverty. Frequent rebellions, chronic dacoity and the ravages of the war that was just over had brought about a truly terrible state of affairs. The British advance in 1852 had dislocated the rice-planting throughout the Delta; hence there was a severe famine in the next year. All the grain for the army of occupation had to be imported from India. Upper Burma, which normally imported a small supply of rice from the south, did actually produce a surplus of wheat and gram, which was collected as a royal monopoly. Thus Mindon Min was able to offer the British in 1854 nearly 20,000 baskets of wheat and about half that amount of gram, at the rate of Rs. 250 and Rs. 200 respectively per hundred baskets, to be delivered at Prome. The price was high, as prices went then, but Lord Dalhousie enthusiastically sanctioned the purchase, as a "very efficacious additional

guarantee for the maintenance of peace". It was indeed a Gilbertian situation, with Mindon Min supplying grain to the British Army, and consoling himself with the handsome profits for the loss of Pegu. It was also a retharkable coup for Spears, and to his credit let it be mentioned that he made not an anna out of it.

¶ But it was during the period of the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny that Spears showed his true worth. Under his influence the Court of Ava made no hostile move whatever, although the Armenians at Amarapura did their utmost to persuade the King that the British Raj in India was on the point of collapse. In the Crimean War they assured him that Russian might was invincible and that they would conquer India, so that soon he would be able to march into Pegu and drive out the exhausted British. Spears, however, kept Mindon well informed as to the real state of affairs, and the King wisely listened to his advice. It was a great achievement, for Burmese ignorance of foreign affairs was pathetic. ¶ There is a story that Mindon once called for a map of the world and asked to have England pointed out to him. "Yes," he said, "I always knew that England is a very small country." Then he asked to see what Burma looked like in comparison. When this was shown him he became so enraged that his instructor in terror spread out both hands over the map, covering half the world, and declared that that was Burma.

So valuable did Spears prove, that Lord Dalhousie at times feared that the people on the spot might come to forget that he was only a private merchant employed by the Government of India as a news-writer in a foreign capital. On one occasion indeed the ever-watchful Governor-General did have to remind Phayre of the exact character of Spears's position. ¶ There were from time to time the usual frontier troubles, which Burmese local feudal lords were always ready to stir up if not closely watched. Early in 1855 a Karen village not far from Myede was raided. Phayre at once addressed an official complaint to the Wungyi in charge of British relations. No reply was vouchsafed. So after a discreet interval he made use of the good offices of Spears to move the Court of Ava to take appropriate action. This fact plainly appeared in the official reply which stated that as the result of representations by Spears the Government had issued orders. ¶ Dalhousie therefore had to take the matter up with Phayre and tell him that Spears must not be allowed "to act in any way apparently as an Agent for the Government". In actual prac-

tice, however, this rule was not rigidly adhered to. In the course of time all the intercourse between the British authorities and the Court of Ava came to pass, "unofficially" but no less really, through Spears's hands, and the position he held differed very little from Burney's in the days of his greatest influence.

But his position was no easy one. Dacoit leaders, notably the great Gaung Gyi, were constantly arising in British territory, and there was always the strong suspicion in British minds that they were instigated by the Court of Ava. Moreover, the Burmese alternated between alarms of another British advance into their country and hopes of a Russian invasion of India which would force the British to evacuate Pegu. Spears, therefore, had to work hard reassuring both sides and tracking down false rumours. He was so successful that before the end of the year 1854 Mindon Min actually sounded him as to the feasibility of sending a complimentary mission to the Governor-General at Calcutta. When he heard of the project Lord Dalhousie was delighted. He let it be known through Spears that if a Burmese mission came to Calcutta he would follow it up with a similar mission to Amarapoorā. So Burmese envoys with a magnificent suite of no less than eighty followers made their way in gilded barges with an escort of war-boats down the Irrawaddy to Myedē *en route* for Rangoon.

At Myedē there occurred an unfortunate incident, which might have had serious consequences but for the firmness of Phayre and the diplomacy of Spears. In the letter from the Kyaukmau Mingyi introducing the mission reference was made to the expected return-mission from the Governor-General in such terms as denoted in the Burmese language the offering of gifts by an inferior to a superior. It was the old trick that had often been played in the past. Never before, however, had the Court of Ava had to deal with an English officer with a first-class knowledge of the language. Phayre at once held up the mission and told them they could proceed no further than Rangoon until a new letter had been substituted with the offensive phrases omitted. Spears with remarkable skill smoothed out the difficulties arising from this incident, and a new letter couched in unexceptionable terms was forwarded to Rangoon. During the long enforced stay of the mission at Rangoon Phayre treated its members with every courtesy and consideration, and so won the heart of its leader, the old Dalla Wun, that on his return from an expedition to pray at the great pagoda at Pegu, he sent the Commiss-

sioner a half-share of the merit acquired by the act. The news of this caused Lord Dalhousie to chortle loudly. "This exquisite subdivision of the value of a work of supererogation outdoes even Cardinal Wiseman's ingenuity," he observed to Phayre.

The arrangements made for their comfort and entertainment on the voyage to and from Calcutta, and during their stay there, vastly impressed the envoys. On their return home every little detail was poured into the eager ears of their royal master. The steamship *Zenobia*, which carried them to Calcutta, bore at her mast-head an immense white flag with the national emblem of Burma, a peacock surrounded by a crimson circle, in its centre. When they disembarked the streets were lined with troops and the King's letter was borne in state in a special carriage with eight golden umbrellas over it, while the guns of Fort William thundered a royal salute. Phayre accompanied them to their state apartments to see that they were comfortably settled. He was the amused witness of a little comedy, typically Burmese in its simplicity. "As soon as the Secretaries to the Government of India left them, the envoys threw off their crimson robes and golden hats, and with universal consent squatting down on their heels, each man produced a flint and steel, lit his cigar, and subsided into the enjoyment of privacy. The old man who carried the King's letter, however, was not forthcoming; and on proceeding to look for him, he was found to have got into bed with the royal letter clasped in his arms." They asked to be allowed to taste European food, and their wish was gratified. They dined in state without embarrassment at Government House, and reverently bowed their heads when grace was said.

When Mindon Min heard about it all, he decided that he in his turn would show the British, when their mission came to Amarapura, that Burma also could show hospitality. One little incident, which happened right at the end of their stay in Calcutta, was not so readily recounted to the King: at first no one could pluck up sufficient courage to relate it. At the moment when after the exchange of the usual compliments, the envoys were about to take their departure, one of them suddenly asked to be permitted to read a statement, and, pulling out a large piece of black paper, proceeded to read out sentence by sentence—with Phayre translating it as he went on—a surprisingly naive plea for the restoration of the province of Pegu. Lord Dalhousie dramatically countered it with the retort, made to Phayre as interpreter: "You may tell the envoys that

so long as the sun shines, which they see, those territories will never be restored to the kingdom of Ava." Ultimately when the King was made aware of the incident, it also was not without its effect upon him. He was also greatly impressed with the photographs which they brought back with them.

This curious incident, it must be remembered, occurred during the Crimean War, a war which to many observers seemed to indicate extraordinary weakness on the part of the British. Spears reported to Phayre that the Armenians were so confident that the English were going to be defeated that one of them even offered to go on a mission to Russia on behalf of Mindon Min. There was also a mysterious adventurer, who called himself General D'Orgoni, and became the centre of much intrigue at Amarapoora. Phayre suspected that he was in communication with Mya Tun, a particularly troublesome dacoit leader in the notoriously restive Tharrawaddy district. He not only spread dangerous rumours, but inspired a project for a Burmese alliance with the King of Sardinia. Spears secured a copy of the draft treaty, which, however, was rejected by Mindon Min. D'Orgoni also inspired the Court of Ava to send agents to Pegu to enumerate British naval and military resources. Then in the middle of the year 1854 he suddenly disappeared for a time and Spears lost track of him. There seems to be no doubt that the Burmese request for the rendition of Pegu was not unconnected with his activities, and that he strengthened the King's resolve not to recognize its cession by treaty.

He next turned up in Paris where he imposed upon that friend of shady adventurers, the Emperor Napoleon III, who sent him to London with a recommendation to the Foreign Office as a man of great influence at Amarapoora. He complained in London that he had not been well treated by the British authorities in India. Lord Dalhousie's reply, when the matter was referred to him, was decidedly pretty. He called D'Orgoni a vagabond and a humbug, and suggested that he might be employed in the new Foreign Legion which was being created for service against Russia. "You will have room there for plenty, and of all sorts," he said. Then the "General" reappeared on the Indian scene and tried to obtain an interview with the Governor-General. This was refused, but he was told he might be employed in the stud department if he cared, but that he must keep away from Pegu. In June, 1855, however, Spears reported

that he was back in the capital with the story that he was commissioned by the French Minister of Marine to secure a contract to supply France with timber to the value of twelve millions of francs. He told Mindon Min that were it not for French assistance in the Crimea, the Russians would sweep the British all into the sea with brooms. When the British mission went up to Amarapoora in September of that year, he gave it out that he intended to go for a trip into the country, but kept in close touch with the Burmese ministers, and worked hard against the success of the mission. Spears discovered that his real name was Girodon, that he had been a sugar planter in the island of Bourbon, and had had to leave hurriedly on account of some law suits. His great aim was to be entrusted with a mission to Paris. The French were beginning to renew their interest in Burma.

The story of the well-known mission to Ava, headed by Phayre, has been fully told by Sir Henry Yule, who accompanied it as Secretary, in a volume which still presents to the student of Burma the best introduction to his subject. It is a volume<sup>1</sup> in which remarkable erudition is decked out with the utmost charm. Phayre's own report of the mission occupies no less than 102 folio pages of Volume 196 of the *India Secret Proceedings*. The reception accorded by the Burmese to the mission was unique. Never before in their history had so genuinely friendly a welcome been bestowed upon foreign envoys. Phayre himself, on account of his long association with the country and his intimate knowledge of its customs, religion and literature, had a tremendous reputation with the Burmese. They felt that he understood them. Mindon Min also had conceived a great admiration for him. And he was on his mettle to outdo the splendid reception given to his own emissaries at Calcutta. This is how Phayre described the treatment of his mission: "In personal demeanour the King was throughout our stay at the capital most kind both to myself and to every member of the Mission. He attended almost daily to our personal comfort, and frequently asked if the European soldiers had everything they desired. Every day numerous dishes of Burmese sweetmeats, prepared under the superintendence of the Princess of Pukhan, a cousin of the King, were sent to us from the Palace, together with fruits and other viands, a portion being always expressly for the soldiers of the Escort. We all too

<sup>1</sup>*A Narrative of the Mission sent by the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava in 1855* (London, 1859).

were supplied with good and wholesome bread daily at the King's expense."

There were, of course, the usual attempts on the part of the ministers to make the envoys look as small as possible on ceremonial occasions. Difficulties were raised regarding the particular gate of the palace through which the state entry of the mission should be made and, of course, the everlasting shoe question. The ministers were hide-bound in matters of etiquette, and it was not mere arrogance, as suggested by Sir William Lee-Warner in his *Life of Lord Dalhousie*, that made them cling to it so tenaciously, but fear of all the possible consequences that might ensue from any relaxation, and hence unwillingness to take responsibility for it. Sir William's picture of the reception accorded to the mission conveys a much less favourable impression than the one given by Yule in his book and Phayre in his official diary of proceedings. He seems to have been unduly influenced by the fact that Phayre failed to persuade Mindon Min to sign a treaty, even the very simple one drafted by Lord Dalhousie, affirming amity but making no direct reference to the cession of Pegu. After all, it was not the main purpose of the mission to negotiate a treaty, and neither Dalhousie nor Phayre really believed that one would have any value. Phayre summed up the position admirably in these words:

"It is probable that a variety of motives urge the King not to sign a treaty. In the first place there is not a doubt that he is keenly sensitive as to what may be written of him in the *Chronicles of the Kings of Burma*. He thinks a good deal of this; and feels that his name might be dishonoured if connected with the yielding of territory, even tacitly. When he ordered me to be supplied with a copy of the *History of Burma*, I heard him give some directions in an undertone regarding the period up to which the history was to be given; and I find it is brought up to 1822, so as not to include the narrative of the loss of territory by his uncle. He, no doubt, considers that many chances may arise to render a treaty avoidable." He then goes on to enumerate these, some of them, he says, "rather wild to count on"—the possible Russian invasion of India, the *Santal rising*, of which Mindon Min had heard exaggerated rumours, the fact that a new Governor-General would shortly take over from Lord Dalhousie, the proposed Burmese mission to France, and the possibility that Napoleon III might influence Queen Victoria to give up Pegu.

Lord Dalhousie was more than satisfied with the results of the mission. The real object of the mission was to confirm the good relations, which had been growing up between Great Britain and Burma, he wrote to the home government: "From its first entrance into Burmese waters until its return to our own frontier the Mission was treated with the highest distinction and with the utmost hospitality and liberality. No mission from any state has ever yet received such marks of honour from the Court of Ava . . . and I desire to record my firm conviction, that peace with Burma is to the full as secure as any written treaty could have made it." The real test of Phayre's diplomacy lies not in this failure to persuade Mindon Min to make a treaty, but in the fact that the good relations which he established through Thomas Spears with Mindon Min were in no way adversely affected by the successive shocks of the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. Our history books praise the Lawrencees for the attitude of the Sikhs during the Mutiny; the equally remarkable service performed by Phayre and Spears in Burma has never yet been properly recognized.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE SECOND BRITISH RESIDENCY (1862-1879)

THOMAS SPEARS CONTINUED TO ACT AS BRITISH CORRESPONDENT AT the Court of Ava until 1861 when he brought his family to Rangoon, and after settling them in a house in Phayre Street, left for a long stay in Europe. While he was away, Phayre, who had become first Chief Commissioner of British Burma, negotiated a commercial treaty with Mindon Min. It provided that traders from British territory were to be permitted to operate along the whole course of the Irrawaddy, in return for similar advantages which were guaranteed to traders from Upper Burma along the British section of the river. It was also arranged that both sides should make reciprocal concessions in the matter of customs duties at the frontier. In pursuance of this object the British abolished duties on Upper Burma goods to the tune of £60,000 a year and on foreign goods in transit for Upper Burma to the amount of £30,000 a year. In addition the import of rice from Pegu into Upper Burma was allowed duty free. The Burmese, however, found the usual ways and means of postponing the performance of their part of the agreement in respect of customs duties. The treaty further provided for the re-establishment of the British Residency, and the first Resident, Dr. Williams, entered upon his duties in 1862 at the new city of Mandalay, whither Mindon Min had transferred his capital in 1857. |s

Thomas Spears now drops out of the picture. He returned to Burma a sick man in 1867 and died early the next year. He lies buried in Pazundaung Cemetery, just outside Rangoon, where his tombstone could still be seen up to the time of the Japanese occupation. To him must go the chief credit for the re-establishment of the English Residency in 1862. Unfortunately, however, the great work he had achieved, in building up and maintaining a satisfactory understanding between the British and the Court of Ava, did not long survive his departure from Mandalay. Even under the Residency, and in spite of the more favourable treaty negotiated by

Phayre's successor, Sir Albert Fytche,<sup>1</sup> in 1867. Anglo-Burmese relations were never again on so good a footing as they had been under Spears's able management.

At first relations were tolerably satisfactory, despite Mindon's disappointment in the failure of a mission, which he sent to Queen Victoria, headed by his chief minister, the Kinwun Mingyi. He had hoped by direct contact with the British Government to secure the retrocession of Pegu. But he raised no difficulties over having to deal with the Viceroy of India, and invariably treated British officers with courtesy, though firmly refusing to relax Burmese Court etiquette over what had come to be known as the "Shoe Question." It was, of course, an indignity of long standing that British envoys were required to take off their shoes before entering the royal presence, and sit upon the floor before the King in the *shiko* position—i.e., kneeling down and sitting upon their feet. As the years went on, and more Burmese officials travelled abroad, it was felt that a more enlightened procedure should be insisted upon. Matters came to a head in 1875, when Sir Douglas Forsyth, who had been on a mission to Mandalay, protested to the Government of India against the continuance of the custom. Later in that year Burmese envoys, who had come to India to greet the Prince of Wales, were accommodated with chairs and allowed to wear their shoes when officially received by the Viceroy. Then the British Resident at Mandalay was instructed not to take off his shoes or sit on the floor in future when received by the King. But Mindon dared not yield: it would have meant losing face with his people. Hence no British Resident was ever again received in audience by a King of Burma. It was most unfortunate that the matter could not be settled otherwise. The loss of direct personal contact with the King seriously affected British relations with the Court of Ava, and played its part in bringing about the collapse of the monarchy.

Phayre's commercial treaty of 1862 largely failed in its object, and within a few years fresh negotiations had to be entertained. They resulted in Fytche's treaty of 1867, which had for a time much better results. Under it steamers began to run regularly from Rangoon to Mandalay in 1868 and to Bhamo in the following year. Englishmen were at this period vastly interested in opening up the trade of Yunnan through the Burma route, and Mindon Min looked favourably upon their efforts. The treaty of 1867 provided for an

<sup>1</sup>A descendant of the Elizabethan, Ralph Fitch.

English political agent to be stationed at Bhamo to foster the trade. The results, however, were disappointing. The Panthay rebellion caused a long period of anarchy in Western China, and in any case there was not much trade to be had with Yunnan in those days. The wild tribes north of Bhamo also were a menace to settled trade; they were subject to no real control from any higher power.

The treaty of 1867 prescribed certain restrictions to the system of royal monopolies, limiting them to teak, earth-oil and precious stones. But in practice this object of the treaty—its most important one—was completely frustrated, and all purchases had still to be made through the King's brokers. The European traders of Rangoon protested to the Government of India, but nothing could be done to break down the vicious system, which cramped the trade of the Burmese kingdom and led to stagnation. The contrast between the poverty of Upper Burma and the prosperity of British Burma became so marked that, notwithstanding the royal veto, the population of the north began steadily to migrate to the south, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal, when the shortening of the journey to Europe led to an increased demand for the staple products of Burma. (The splendid new port of Rangoon, laid out by Lieutenant Fraser of the Royal Engineers under Lord Dalhousie's personal supervision, began to develop by enormous strides.)

The British frontier had been fixed by Lord Dalhousie on the line of latitude running six miles north of Myede. The work of surveying it and fixing frontier posts was carried out by Major Allan, after whom the old frontier customs station got its present name of Allanmyo. When the survey officers proceeding eastwards were about halfway between the Sittang and the Salween, they came to the hill tracts known as Western Karen, the home of fierce and backward tribes known as the Red Karen, from their practice of tatooing the rising sun in bright vermillion on their backs. Their traditions hark back to the Gobi desert between China and Tibet. As they claimed that the Court of Ava had always respected their independence, Lord Dalhousie agreed to recognize it and to protect them from aggression from the north. They were, however, slave raiders, who made a business of collecting Burmese and Shan slaves and selling them to the Siamese. Burmese officials also would instigate them to commit depredations into British territory. In 1873 Mindon sent troops to occupy Karen, and, when the British objected, laid claim to the territory. That was how in 1876 Sir

Douglas Forsyth came to be sent on his mission to Mandalay. As a result both sides agreed that Karen was to remain indepehdent. It was a bad arrangement. The country remained backward, and continued to create constant disturbances over the British border.

Mindon Min was devoted to the Buddhist faith. In 1871 he achieved his dearest object when he summoned the Fifth Buddhist Council in history to meet at Mandalay and recite the scriptures of orthodox Theravada Buddhism, and added to his titles that of "Convener of the Fifth Buddhist Synod". It was attended by about 2,400 monks; but little came of it beyond the decision to erect a new spire on the great pagoda at Rangoon. There was probably more of nationalist politics than of simple religious piety behind this move: the desire to unite all Burmese Buddhists in allegiance to their King. The British authorities, however, permitted the ceremony, on the strict understanding that the King himself should not be present. Hence the magnificent new hti<sup>1</sup>, gold-plated and studded with jewels, was erected by his envoys in the presence of huge crowds of worshippers, in 1871, and still stands at the top of the Shwe Dagon untouched by Japanese bombing raids upon the city.

During the last few years of Mindon Min's reign relations with the British were steadily deteriorating. Mindon like many of his predecessors was always on the alert to establish relations with other European powers, particularly France, as a counterpoise to British power. But while he was on the throne nothing occurred to cause the British undue worry on this score. He did actually make a treaty of commerce with the Third French Republic in 1873, but it was never ratified, because the Burmese wanted to convert it into a full alliance, providing for the import of arms into the country. In Burmese minds, however, the matter was only in abeyance, and they waited for a convenient opportunity for raising it once more. French technicians of various kinds were welcomed at the capital. They were employed in the royal foundry, they laid out and constructed much of the palace, and provided Burma with its first modern currency, the handsome silver peacock coinage approximating to that of British India.

The isolation of the British Resident at Mandalay from direct contact with the King as a result of the diplomatic *impasse* over the "Shoe Question" was most unfortunate, and shows how badly a man like Thomas Spears was needed at this juncture. It meant that <sup>1</sup>Its estimated worth was £62,000.

all sorts of urgent questions were shelved. It meant also that cases of outrage against British subjects became frequent. Two cases in 1878 attracted a good deal of attention. One was the arrest and barbarous ill-treatment of two Indian washermen (*dhobies*) who were British subjects; the other was the similar treatment of Captain Doyle, of the Irrawaddy Flotilla S.S. *Chindwin*. At the time of these occurrences Mindon Min was a sick man approaching death, and they were symptomatic of the change that was about to take place in Burmese official policy.

The succession to the throne in Burma was always a delicate question. There was no hard and fast rule of primogeniture, and in theory it was a matter for the exercise of royal prerogative. Very often a King would appoint one of his family—a brother or a son—to be *Einshe Min* or Heir Apparent. He would then act as vice-president of the Hluttaw, and, if the King were absent, as regent. Early in his reign Mindon had appointed one of his brothers heir apparent, but in 1866 the unfortunate man had been assassinated by two of Mindon's sons, who were jealous of him. Thereafter, notwithstanding the pressure applied by the British Resident upon him to select a capable son, and officially recognize him as his heir, Mindon refused to make any direct move. He had 53 wives, 48 sons and 62 daughters. He told the Resident that to nominate any of his sons would be equivalent to signing the young man's death warrant. The most popular of his sons was the Nyaungyan Min, who was intelligent and humane. When the King was actually dying, he summoned this prince to the palace, presumably with the intention of nominating him as his successor; but as the mother of another son, the Thibaw Min, had made herself mistress of the palace, the Nyaungyan Min was afraid to put in an appearance there. He and his younger brother took sanctuary inside the British Residency. When the Kinwun Mingyi sent a formal demand for their delivery, this was refused and they were deported to Calcutta, where they remained as pensioners of the British Government. The Resident's action was unwise and there is reason to believe that he thus unintentionally assisted Thibaw to his throne.

~ The dying King was anxious to nominate three of his sons as joint rulers, but the ministers, realizing that this would mean civil war, lent themselves to the plot of Thibaw's mother to put him on the throne. He was only twenty, had led a studious and religious life, and was a complete nonentity. They thought that with such a

King it would be possible to carry out a revolution in the government by substituting the rule of a small cabinet of ministers for the time-honoured royal despotism. The British Resident indulged in the fond hope that this was a sign of constitutional progress. But as there was no representative system in the country, upon which such a form of government could be based, and as the ministers owed their own position to the fact that they were chosen by and responsible to the King alone, it is difficult to see how anyone expected the new system to work. In any case the pretty little scheme was speedily sabotaged by a new and dominating personality who obtained complete control over the weak young king. Tradition prescribed that a Burmese king must take a wife from among his half-sisters, and the one foisted upon Thibaw by a carefully laid palace intrigue was the Princess Supayalat. She at once persuaded her husband to imprison and ultimately massacre all his kinsmen on whom hands could be laid. In February, 1879, therefore nearly eighty members of the royal family were collected in a large room behind locked doors and clubbed to death or strangled by ruffians specially released from jail for the purpose, and fortified with alcohol. The shedding of royal blood was taboo: hence the procedure. The bodies, dead or alive, were then thrown into a huge trench, earth was hastily thrown over the top, which was then trampled over by elephants.

The Kinwun Mingyi and his colleagues made no real attempt to prevent this atrocious deed from being carried out. They seem to have believed that it would simplify their task of fastening their scheme for cabinet government upon the King. Hence, when the British Resident sent in a strong protest, the Kinwun Mingyi himself drafted the curt reply saying that the King as an independent sovereign had the right to take all necessary measures to prevent disturbance in his own country, and that there were very good precedents for what had taken place. Nevertheless, Mr. Shaw's remonstrance was effective in saving the lives of some of those who were on the proscribed list. He threatened to haul down the British flag and break off all relations with the Court, if the slaughter continued.

An intense state of alarm suddenly developed as a result of this massacre. The Burmese became exceedingly alarmed when they discovered, to their surprise, how completely horror-stricken was English opinion. They began hurriedly to call up troops and send them to the frontier with one month's advance pay in their pockets. They were scared for fear the British would march on Mandalay.

The British on their side therefore had to take precautionary measures both against frontier troubles and for the safety of the Residency. An armed steamboat was kept at the frontier in hourly readiness to rush aid to the Resident. There was, of course, telegraphic communication between the Resident and the Chief Commissioner of British Burma. The Government of India had up its sleeve a number of important matters outstanding from the previous reign, and was anxious to have them settled. The Court of Ava was aware of this, and would have been by no means surprised had a British ultimatum been presented.¶

No ultimatum, however, was delivered. The Government of India had recommended a strong policy, but the home authorities had been unwilling to adopt it. Great Britain was already fighting—somewhat ingloriously—two native wars, one against Afghanistan and the other against Cetewayo, the Zulu war lord. Trouble with the Boers also was brewing in South Africa. Hence in view of all these embarrassments when Major-General Knox Gore, questioned on the subject of the feasibility of a Burma campaign, replied that while he could take Mandalay with 500 men, he would require another 5,000 in addition to the already reinforced Burma garrison for the much more difficult task of "pacifying" Upper Burma, the British Cabinet decided that its attitude towards Thibaw must remain that of extreme "forbearance." In the light of later experience we now know that while the first part of Knox Gore's estimate was quite correct, the second was a considerable understatement.

As might have been expected, Thibaw's ministers interpreted British forbearance as a sign of weakness, and as soon as their first feelings of panic subsided, anti-British incidents once more became frequent. In April, 1879, a fracas took place on an Irrawaddy Flotilla Company's steamer at Sinbyugyun, owing to local Burmese labourers deliberately piling heaps of *Ngapi* (pickled fish with a most offensive smell) on the bedding and luggage of the passengers. An official riding a pony was the instigator of the trouble. In the following month the British Assistant-Resident at Mandalay was insulted by a crowd of young Burmese roughs, when returning from an early morning ride. These were in a sense trifling matters, but they showed which way the wind was blowing. Calcutta therefore became more worried still regarding the safety of the Residency. Hence when Mr. Shaw, the Resident, died at Mandalay in June, no formal appointment of a successor was made. Relations with the Court





GROUP OF BURMESE NOTABLES  
Sketched in 1855 by Capt. H. Yule and Colesworth Grant

of Ava were placed temporarily under the care of the Commissioner of Pegu, and a *Chargé d'affaires*, Mr. St. Barbe, took over at Mandalay. He lived in a state of continuous blockade: no Burman dared to be seen entering or leaving the Residency, and there were persistent rumours that Thibaw contemplated a massacre of its inmates. Actual preparations for such a deed were made several times during 1879. [In September, Sir Louis Cavagnari, the British Resident at Kabul, was murdered by the Afghans. This decided the question of the Mandalay Residency. Orders for its withdrawal were at once passed. Mr. St. Barbe and his whole staff left Mandalay, without incident, on the 7th of October.]

The Court of Ava, rather disconcerted at this drastic step, at once deputed an ambassador with a letter and presents to the Viceroy of India. He was, however, held up at the frontier of British Burma in order that the aims and objects of his mission might be clarified before he proceeded further. He was told that if he were empowered to discuss a new treaty with the Government of India, his mission would be entertained at Calcutta, but if not, he could save himself the trouble of going any further. For the next six months he remained as the guest of the British at Thayetmyo, while the question of his powers was debated between Calcutta and Mandalay. Finally, when no reasonable proposals for adjusting the matters in dispute between the British and the Court of Ava were forthcoming, he returned to Mandalay; but not until after he had addressed so improper a letter to the Chief Commissioner of Burma that it was returned to him. Thus ended the second British attempt to maintain direct intercourse with the Court of Ava.

## CHAPTER XVII

### FRANCE AGAIN TAKES A HAND

THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE BRITISH RESIDENCY FROM MANDALAY in 1879 ushers in the last act of the sordid tragedy of the Alaungpaya dynasty. War had become inevitable. That is clear to us with our after-the-event wisdom, though it was by no means realized by most of the actors in the drama itself. And it was rather a cheap little tragedy. A weakling, already a gin addict, ruled by a little tigress, who would stick at nothing in order to maintain her position. She had no education, no knowledge of anything outside the narrow little circle of the Mandalay Court, which was a pathetically pinchbeck affair of glass and tinsel. And most of the ministers, chief of whom in the royal favour was the sinister Taingda Mingyi, were mere sycophants and intriguers. King, Queen and ministers all believed that they could continue with their intrigues and murders without interference, since the British were too busily engaged in other parts of the world to devote serious attention to Burma.

It is not surprising then that from 1879 onwards Thibaw's attitude towards the British grew more hostile. He and his crazy advisers forgot that a time might come when, with the Zulu, Afghan and Transvaal wars finished, Great Britain would be in a position to take notice of the repeated warnings from Calcutta to the effect that the policy of forbearance was being carried too far. They failed to realize also that it was doubly dangerous to attempt the exceedingly delicate game of playing off one great power against another, when you are quite unable to put your own house in order. And not only was the palace itself often reduced to a state of pandemonium, but the country also was becoming completely disorganized. Dacoit bands ravaged almost unchecked, the Kachins of the north broke into open rebellion, Chinese guerilla bands burnt out Bhamo, and most of the feudatory Shan sawbwas threw off their allegiance. Escaped princes of the royal family were attempting to foment rebellion, and two of them, the Myingun Min and the Nyaungyan Min, were both more popular and far more intelligent than the King himself. Had it not been that ultimately both were

#### FRANCE AGAIN TAKES A HAND

interned, the former by the French at Pondicherry, and the latter by the British at Calcutta, one or other of them would most certainly have seized the throne.

In 1882 a half-hearted attempt to negotiate a new treaty with Calcutta, was indeed made. An envoy was sent thither and was given a very favourable reception by Lord Ripon. But just when hopes of a friendly settlement were beginning to rise, Thibaw suddenly recalled him. Mandalay had become the magnet for French agents, and in the absence of a British Resident they had an unrivalled opportunity for working upon the minds of the King and his ministers. Thus was the fatal step taken which ultimately forced the British to march to Mandalay. In May, 1883, a Burmese mission was despatched to tour Europe, ostensibly for the purpose of seeking information concerning the industrial arts and sciences, which even the backward little court at Mandalay realized had given to Europeans so dominating a position throughout the world. In reality, of course, the mission went to seek foreign alliances and commercial treaties, which, it was fondly believed, would operate as a counterpoise to British interests in Indo-China.) Thus did Thibaw essay the role of *tertius gaudens*, in blissful ignorance of the elementary fact that in his position everything was against him. There was only one possible policy for him, and that was to cultivate British friendship for all he was worth. If the British Government was willing to go to the utmost extreme of forbearance in face of his deliberate policy of unfriendliness, it could obviously be a very useful friend. But as soon as a third power came really and truly into the picture, the policy of forbearance had willy-nilly to be scrapped, and his independence brought to an end. Ordinary plain facts like these, however, were entirely beyond Burmese comprehension.

The Burmese embassy consisted of an *Atwinwun*, a *Wundauk* and a *Sayedawgyi*. An *Atwinwun* was an officer of the royal household, who actually came into closer contact with the King than the Wungis. He was a member of a secret council, the *Byedaik*, which spied upon all the officers and departments of government. In a very real sense therefore the head of the embassy was a confidential servant of the King. His assistants were very much less influential members of the government<sup>1</sup>, but they had been educated in Europe in Mindon's reign and spoke English and French. Their chief knew <sup>1</sup>Wundauk—Minister of the second grade; Sayedawgyi—Clerk of the Hluttaw.

no other language than his mother tongue. Accompanied by a French gentleman, M. de Trévelec, they made a bee line for Paris, where, apparently oblivious of the advertised object of their mission, they devoted their attention to the French Foreign Office.

The British Foreign Office soon became extremely inquisitive regarding the doings of the three Burmese ministers. It was well known that the original treaty negotiations between France and Burma in 1873 had broken down because the Burmese stipulated that provision should be made in it for them to purchase warlike stores from the French. Hence, when it became known that the Burmese mission was anxious to renew negotiations for the unratified treaty of 1873, Lord Lyons, the British Ambassador in Paris, was instructed to point out firmly to the French Government that as the British Government had a special interest in the Kingdom of Ava, it was essential that no treaty, involving anything more than commerce pure and simple, should be entertained by France, and in particular that no facilities should be given to the Burmese for the purchase of arms.

The matter was regarded by the British Government as all the more urgent on account of the great strides that French power was making in Indo-China at the time. In the sixties Cochin China and Cambodia had come under French control, and their prospectors had explored the Mekong River as far as Yunnan. Throughout the seventies their influence had been increasing in Annam and Tongking. In 1882 the French had had to face an insurrection in Tongking, but at the very moment when the Burmese mission was comfortably ensconced in Paris, they were dictating a treaty to the Emperor of Annam, whereby both Annam and Tongking became French protectorates. The guiding spirit in this movement of expansion was Jules Ferry, the French Foreign Minister, with whom Lord Lyons began diplomatic conversations on the subject of Burma in the summer of 1883.

Ferry's attitude right from the start was unsatisfactory. He assured Lyons that the Burmese had presented no credentials to the President of the Republic and that although they had presented certain proposals of a commercial nature to the Commercial Division of the Foreign Office, no progress had been made, because the Burmese Envoy was not armed with adequate powers. He promised that no agreement with Burma would be concluded at Paris. The British Government's suspicions were increased rather than lulled

by this obvious piece of diplomatic fencing. Lyons came in again and again to the attack as the months passed by and the Burmese mission remained in Paris, and little by little Ferry had to admit that a treaty was being discussed, and that the reciprocal appointment of diplomatic agents by the two governments was contemplated. He tried again, however, to reassure Lyons on the subject of the arms question, saying, that, with Tongking in an extremely disturbed state, his Government was not disposed to take any step which would facilitate the introduction of arms into that country itself.

As Lord Granville, the British Foreign Secretary, was still unsatisfied, Lord Lyons in July 1884 set down a statement of the British position in black and white, and handed it to M. Ferry. The Frenchman then retreated a step further. He said it was difficult to draw a clear line between what was political and what was purely commercial, and that as it was intended to appoint a French Consul-General at Mandalay, such an officer would naturally take charge of all French interests there. Lord Lyons became more and more persistent, and at last Ferry admitted that the Burmese wanted nothing less than a political alliance and facilities for the purchase of arms. He gave, however, a specific assurance that no such alliance would be concluded. The British Foreign Office therefore let the matter drop for the time being.

While these protracted discussions were in progress in Paris, trouble had broken out again regarding the boundary between Manipur and Burma. When the Kabaw Valley question was decided in favour of Burma through the intervention of Major Burney in 1834, no precise demarcation of the boundary line had been undertaken. Now, with Thibaw on the throne of Burma, and chaos reigning throughout the land, frontier disturbances had recurred. Hence the Calcutta authorities decided in 1881 to appoint a commission to mark out the boundary. The Court of Ava was accordingly invited to co-operate, but it refused to do so and intimated that it would not recognize any line drawn by the British Commission. The Commission, however, proceeded to do its work, and as it was found that certain villages, claimed by the Burmese, were actually in Manipuri territory, they were requested to withdraw an armed guard from one of them.

The argument went on throughout 1882 and 1883 with the Court of Ava threatening to remove the boundary posts set up by the

British Commission. In May, 1884, the Court of Ava wrote to Calcutta objecting to the boundary line, again threatening to pull down the posts, and announcing the intention to attack the British outpost at Kongkal (Burmese Kaungkan) if their views were not accepted. Calcutta replied that the consequence of embarking upon such action would be serious, and in order to forestall such a move the Chief Commissioner of Assam was authorized to instruct the Maharaja of Manipur to resist it by force of arms. A detachment of sepoys was to be sent to reinforce him, if necessary. There, however, the matter ended. The Court of Ava decided that discretion was the better part of valour.

Meanwhile, the chaos in Upper Burma became worse, and in 1884 the slaughters at the Mandalay palace increased to such an extent that the British and Chinese residents of Rangoon began to express feelings of high indignation. A meeting was held at which a petition was drafted asking the Government of India to intervene and bring Thibaw's misrule to an end. Money was actually collected and sent to the Myingun Min at Pondicherry asking him to stage a rebellion, but the French kept him under close surveillance. The Rangoon Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution demanding annexation or a change of government at Mandalay, and Dr. Marks, the most prominent Church of England divine there, thundered from his pulpit against Thibaw's misdeeds. The Chief Commissioner, Sir Charles Bernard, was opposed to annexation. He pointed out that it would upset Burmese opinion in British Burma, disturb the Indian princes, and entail long years of expensive and troublesome operations in reducing Upper Burma to order. He thought, however, that the Burmese would welcome the Nyaungyan Min, and that he would prove a satisfactory ruler. But the Government of India would not move; it said, quite correctly, that internal misgovernment did not justify intervention. The Nyaungyan Min died early in 1885 and with him the hope, in British breasts, of establishing a satisfactory Burmese king at Mandalay. The Myingun Min was considered too much under French influence to be a suitable candidate.

Then it was that French action caused the non-intervention policy to be dropped. In January, 1885, Lord Lyons had once again to take up with the French Foreign Office the subject of Burmese relations. The Burmese mission was still in Paris and British suspicions were rising. Jules Ferry was therefore asked to clarify the position.

His reply was distinctly unfriendly. He pointed out that as France and Upper Burma were now neighbours, treaty arrangements concerning their common frontier had become necessary. Lord Lyons rejoined that the Burmese were causing such difficulties for the Government of India, that if Great Britain had to use force to bring the Court of Ava to a due regard for its obligations, it would be very unfortunate if a treaty between Burma and France were the cause of such action. Ferry fenced no longer. He told the British Ambassador that a treaty with Burma had just been signed, but that it was limited entirely to commercial matters and contained nothing military or political. The question of the exact powers to be conferred upon the French Consul, who was to be stationed at Mandalay, was not yet settled. Ferry did his utmost to assure Lord Lyons that the treaty was a very harmless affair.

↑ But Ferry had deliberately double-crossed the British Government. On the very day when the treaty was signed in Paris he had handed a secret letter to the Burmese envoy, which contained the following passage: "With respect to transport through the province of Tonquin to Burma of arms of various kinds, ammunition and military stores generally, amicable arrangements will be come to with the Burmese Government for the passage of the same when peace and order prevail in Tonquin, and the officers stationed there are satisfied that it is proper, and that there is no danger." In July, 1885, this letter was seen in the Mandalay palace by one of the royal servants who was in touch with the Chief Commissioner of British Burma. A copy of it was forwarded to him, and sent on by him to the Viceroy of India, who telegraphed it to London.

Before that dramatic incident occurred, the French Consul, M. Haas, had arrived in Mandalay. There was also a Burmese envoy in Paris. Between them it was arranged that French concessionaires should establish a bank in Mandalay, build a railway from Mandalay to the railhead in British Burma, and take over the management of the royal monopolies. The idea was that France would grant loans to Thibaw in return for industrial concessions. But Haas urged Thibaw to improve his relations with the British for the time being and even entertain once again a British Resident. He suggested that under the cloak of better relations, Thibaw should negotiate treaties with France, Germany and Italy, proclaiming his kingdom to be neutral territory. But the headstrong King and

his ministers refused this astute advice, although they swallowed his commercial proposals without a blink.)

The British Cabinet and the Government of India were at last thoroughly alarmed at the course events were now taking; Lord Salisbury himself informed the French Ambassador in London that he could not agree to the proposed French concessions in Burma. The French Ambassador replied that he had no knowledge of any such concessions. But the British Government persisted in its enquiries, using very definite threats of intervention; and the French found themselves in such a difficult position that they repudiated all Haas's acts, and in October, 1885, he was removed from his post "for reasons of health". Why this sudden *volte face*? The answer is not far to seek. The French had in the early months of 1885 suffered some unpleasant reverses in Tongking. Moreover, Ferry's forward policy in Indo-China had led to war with China. At the same time they were fighting in Madagascar. There was a revulsion of feeling in France against all these new war-like commitments, and in March Ferry's cabinet had fallen. At the last moment France had climbed down, but it was already too late so far as Thibaw was concerned. He had taken steps that could have only one result.)

The Bombay-Burma Trading Corporation, whose chief offices and timber-mills were in Rangoon, had for many years worked the Ningyan teak forests north of Toungoo and somewhat beyond the British Burma frontier. They operated under a contract with the Mandalay Government. Soon after coming to the throne Thibaw was in financial difficulties, and his ministers began to look round for money wherever it could be obtained. Some of the royal jewels were pawned: state lotteries were run; but expedients such as these did not help very much. Hence, the ministers turned to the prosperous Bombay-Burma Corporation and began to accuse it of bribing local officials, of extracting more than twice the number of logs than were paid for, and of failing to pay its Burmese employees. New contracts involving substantially higher payments were made in 1880, 1882 and 1883, and, as might be expected, caused a certain amount of confusion, which made it easy for the Burmese Government to trump up a case against the Corporation.

And it was indeed what is known to the law as a "false" case. The Toungoo Forest Office was willing for its records to be examined showing the number of teak logs imported from Upper Burma.

The Corporation was prepared to produce the acquittances signed by its foresters. But the Hluttaw, which dealt with the case, was not concerned with evidence. It had been informed that a private French syndicate was being formed to take over the forests if the Corporation were evicted. Hence it proceeded to give an *ex parte* judgment that the Corporation had defrauded the King of the equivalent in English money of £73,333 and the foresters of £33,333. The Corporation was fined double the amount of the first sum, and ordered to pay the second to the foresters. The fine itself was to be paid in four monthly instalments. In default, the Corporation's timber in the Ningyan forests was to be seized.

That was in August, 1885. The matter was at once reported to the British Cabinet. There was no denying that a very serious situation had now to be faced. The Cabinet was aware of the contents of Jules Ferry's letter to the Court of Ava, and the French Government was still hedging before Lord Salisbury's repeated demands for a clarification of the position. The British Government therefore was unwilling to carry on with the policy of forbearance any further. On 28th August it asked the Court of Ava to suspend the decree against the Bombay Burma Corporation in order that a proper investigation of the case could be carried out by a judicial officer of experience, who would act as arbitrator. Not until the middle of October did the Court of Ava deign to reply, summarily rejecting the proposal. For years the Military Department at Calcutta had had a plan for the invasion of Burma. It was the last thing that Thibaw's Government in its complete blindness to reality even suspected. Hence when on 30th October it received an ultimatum from Lord Dufferin through the Chief Commissioner of Burma, it was caught completely unprepared.

The ultimatum was delivered by a special steamer, which was instructed to remain at Mandalay until the morning of 6th November. Failing a satisfactory reply in Rangoon by the evening of 10th November a state of war would exist. The ultimatum demanded the suitable reception of a British Resident at Mandalay and the suspension of proceedings against the Bombay Burma Corporation until his arrival here. In addition, the external relationships of the Burmese Government were to be under the control of the Government of India, as in the case of Afghanistan, and facilities for the development of British trade with Western China through Bhamo were to be afforded.

The Court of Ava tried to put up a brave show, but could do no more than bluster. A reply to the ultimatum was sent to Rangoon. It refused to reopen the case against the Corporation, but stated that if the British Government wished to re-appoint an agent he might "come and go as in former times". Commerce with Western China also would "be assisted in conformity with the customs of the country". With regard to external affairs, however, the Burmese ministers stated that "friendly relations with France, Italy and other States have been, are being, and will be maintained". As this reply constituted an uncompromising rejection of the ultimatum, Thibaw followed it up immediately by a proclamation calling upon his people to drive out the British, who intended to destroy their religion and national customs, and announcing that, if attacked, he would himself take the field against the enemy, exterminate them and annex their territory. Volunteers for the army were asked for; service with the forces, they were told, would bring threefold religious merit—good of religion, good of the King, and good of the nation—and would result in leading along the path of the celestial regions to *Neikban* (i.e., Nirvana).

## CHAPTER XVIII

### “ON THE ROAD TO MANDALAY”

AN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE UNDER MAJOR-GENERAL PRENDERGAST, V.C., had been concentrated at Thayetmyo, the British frontier station on the Irrawaddy, at the time of the delivery of the ultimatum. On 14th November it crossed the frontier; on the 28th it occupied Mandalay and the King and Queen were prisoners in their palace. The objects of the expedition, namely, the occupation of Mandalay, and the dethronement of Thibaw, were explained to local officials on the way, and it was hoped that the mere display of force would be sufficient. Everything possible was done to avoid bloodshed. There was indeed very little fighting. Two Italians, Commotto and Molinari, were in charge of schemes to block the approach by river to Mandalay. Commotto's ship was captured on the first day of the campaign with a cargo of long, sharp-pointed posts her crew were attempting to drive into the bed of the river near the frontier. Her papers contained a full account of Thibaw's military preparations. There was some sharp fighting at the forts of Minhlā, on the right bank of the river, and Gwegyaung Kamyo, on the left. At Magwe the two Italians surrendered. They had guaranteed to Thibaw that British troops could never pass their frontier defences.

Stiff resistance was expected at Myingyan, near the junction of the Chindwin with the Irrawaddy. A large body of gaudily dressed troops, commanded by officers under gold umbrellas, was seen in the distance, but they took no part in the fighting, which consisted in silencing two batteries of about twenty-one guns. It transpired afterwards that the main Burmese forces under the Hlethin Atwinwun, Thibaw's best commander, were there, and that before withdrawing, without even a show of resistance, the Atwinwun had telegraphed to the King announcing a great victory. Further upstream a little beyond Yandabo, where the treaty of 1826 had been signed, the royal state barge hove into sight paddled by forty-four men and flying a flag of truce. It contained two envoys from the King bearing an unsigned letter promising all that had been demanded in the ultimatum, and asking for an armistice. General Prendergast demanded unconditional surrender, on the understanding that if

the European residents in Mandalay were in no way molested, the King's life would be spared. Next day, as the flotilla drew near to the old city of Ava, the state barge was seen putting out again with a flag of truce. It brought a telegram from the King accepting the terms. General Prendergast, however, was taking no chances, and went on in battle array to secure the disarmament of the remaining forts and of such troops as he could make contact with. Unfortunately for the later work of pacification, most of the Burmese troops, on hearing of the royal order for surrender, disbanded immediately, taking their arms with them.

The flotilla arrived at Mandalay at 10 a.m. on 28th November, watched with the greatest interest by thousands of spectators on the river bank, rather as if it were a sort of regatta. As the troops disembarked with bands and colours and began to make their formal entry into the city, Queen Supayalat herself watched their approach from a high wooden tower, that used to be a very distinctive feature of the palace enclosure; and the whole population lined the streets to gaze on such a sight as had never been seen there before. Colonel Sladen, who had been Resident during the period 1864-69, was received by Thibaw in the Hall of Audience, having been conducted there by the Kinwun Mingyi, who throughout the reign had remained the nominal head of the government. Everything went through with the formality of an ordinary public reception. The King surrendered himself and his kingdom, asked for a day or two in which to make his preparations for departure, and said that he proposed to leave the palace and go into a summer-house in the royal garden. It was arranged that his formal surrender to General Prendergast should take place on the following day. Three small detachments of troops, one of them an English regiment, took up the task of guarding the palace. The rest returned to the transports.

An appalling blunder was then committed which had disgraceful results. The ministers asked that palace women should be allowed to go in and out of the palace by the western gate leading to the Queen's apartments. As there was reason to believe that the King might attempt to escape dressed as a woman, General Prendergast very naturally hesitated to grant such a concession. One of the ministers at once naively suggested that the sentries might make a personal examination of everyone passing in and out! General Prendergast, however, gave the required permission. How anyone

in his responsible position could have been so incredibly stupid defeats the imagination. During the night nearly all the female attendants in the royal apartments did a bolt, while the female scum of the city poured in and out, looting everything of value they could lay hands on. The King and the royal party were in a state of panic, imagining that they would now be treated in the way that they had treated others in the past. Not until daylight the next morning did Colonel Sladen, who had taken up his quarters for the night in the Hlutdaw building, learn what had been happening. Then he immediately put a stop to it by placing sentries in all the royal apartments.

In the afternoon the King's surrender was formally received by General Prendergast in the small summer-house in the royal gardens. The King was told that he must leave at once and go on board a steamer. Vast crowds thronged the roads to see the pathetic little party, in two small bullock-drawn carriages and a few doolies, taken under escort of the Hampshire Regiment to the riverside and on board the steamer *Thooreah*. It was the first time the King had been outside the palace for seven years. There was nothing even approaching a demonstration in his favour. A few women wailed, but everywhere the crowd was orderly and quiet, though intensely curious to see the royal prisoners. Thibaw and Supayalat were taken straight to Rangoon, where they were transferred to an ocean steamer on which they travelled to Madras, and thence by rail to Ratnagiri fortress on the Bombay coast. After Thibaw's death there in 1917 his Queen was permitted to return to Rangoon, where she lived out the rest of her days in a small private house, a pathetic little old lady, strangely different from the feline personality who had dominated Thibaw in the tragic days before the monarchy came to its sudden inglorious end.

With the King gone, the fate of his kingdom remained to be settled. Pending a decision, a provisional government was set up under General Prendergast. The administration of the country was to be carried on by such officers of state as agreed to co-operate loyally with the British Government. At the head of it was a Council of State composed of thirteen ministers. Public opinion in England, was universally in favour of annexation. The Government of India, realizing that a huge task of pacification lay ahead of it, would have preferred to place the country under a protectorate, with an approved member of the royal family on the throne. Unfortunately

Thibaw's massacres had disposed of all but a very few claimants, and of these only the Nyaungyan Min, who had died in the previous June, was considered suitable. Hence on 1st January, 1886, a proclamation was issued annexing the territories formerly governed by King Thibaw to the British dominions. The task of reducing the country to order proved a far more difficult one than anyone had ever imagined. But that is part of another story.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This has been fully dealt with in Sir Charles Crosthwaite's *The Pacification of Burma* (London, 1912).

## READING LIST

*Note.*—There is a wealth of published literature on European relations with Burma, but except at the British Museum, the Bodleian Library and the India and Burma Office Library most of it is by no means easy to come by. Some of the books are rare; others would be almost unobtainable were it not for excellent modern reprints, notably those produced by the Hakluyt Society. By far the best modern bibliography is to be found in John L. Christian's *Modern Burma* (Univ. of California Press, 1942). The writer's own card index of titles runs to several hundred entries. The following list is a selection which will provide the general reader with much that he can enjoy, if he has the mind and the opportunity to pursue the subject further.

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